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1. Poetry, American

NBI
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WHISPERINGS OF THE SPHINX

WHISPERINGS OF THE SPHINX

BY

WILLIAM LEIGHTON

AUTHOR OF "THE HISTORY OF OLIVER AND ARTHUR," "THE SONS OF GODWIN," "AT THE COURT OF KING EDWIN," ETC.

CHICAGO
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TO MY SON

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Whisperings of the Sphinx

I

Change

"What is it walks at morn on four feet, two
At noon, and three at night?" In desert sand
Sat the wise Sphinx, and in that Theban land
Asked her enigma; and we ask anew,
What is this creature? Œdipus, 'tis true,
Answered: "The thing is man." We understand
He guessed the name, but not the meaning grand,
Within the deep enigma, hid from view.
The Theban Sphinx was pondering: "What is man?"
As we must ponder in this later age:
Is he but highest type of earthly things,
Or the angelic heir of Nature's plan?
And his Earth-travel, a short pilgrimage
That, toward a Heavenly life, his journey brings?

What does it mean, this dizzy whirl of things
That we call life? If Science speak, alas,
Her voice is drowned in louder sounds that pass
Her colder tones, the violent outcryings
Of turbulent emotions! Nature sings
In chords and discords whose confusing mass
Deafens our ears; and yet the flowers, trees, grass,

Oceans, hills, forests — all have vocal strings
Tuned to man's every mood, thought's every theme.
All forms of animal life on earth, in sea,
In air — infinity of creatures—all
Are breeding, living, dying, in a scheme
Where each hath time and place. And why are we
Actors and viewers of this carnival?

Life's problems — how they press upon the mind!
How numberless! how vast! how intricate! —
The simplest fortune and the humblest fate
Some form of answering thought must seek to find.
No brain so sluggish, and no soul so blind,
Not to have felt life's movements — love, pride, hate,
Longings, emotions, passions; each hath weight
Which all must feel and strive to measure. Kind
Or harsh though fate, the spirit's deepest cell
Hath no retreat of calm serenity
Where we may hush our mental questionings:
Whether we do our life-work ill or well?
If life endureth to eternity?
If good or ill lives in the soul of things?

If always life would move by certain ways
It were a simple thing to draw its plan,
And make a pleasant garden-path for man
Where he could pass contented all his days;

But man is not content: some thought betrays
His calm of happiness; nor ever can
He win the peace of soul ere doubt began:
The germ of doubt, once born, forever stays.
With their entangling lines of mystery,
The wonders round him stir his interest,
Awaking thoughts of strange perplexity
While leading him, with still increasing zest,
Through ways in which his bosom thrills to find
Nature's response to sympathetic mind.

Beyond his garden-walk kind Nature's smile
May cheer the voyager: from her banks of flowers
And roses blooming in their perfumed bowers
Beauty will charm the wanderer in his toil
If he return an answering smile the while:
The forests grandly sing to him; his powers
The restless ocean stirs; his troubled hours
Nature hath often power to reconcile.
The lightning gleams above him; peal on peal
The thunder roars; the storm, the hurricane,
Sweep over him: unharmed while mountains reel,
He sees that Nature, in her stormiest reign,
Hath often kindness in her stern commands,
And toucheth tenderly with giant hands.

But wherefore do I linger? While I wait
The all-controlling march of Change waits not;
Nor in the universe is there one spot

Exempt from its constraint; nor any state
Immunity from Change can arrogate.
It moveth mountains, seas; what man doth plot
Its tyrant hand may in an instant blot;
Empires are humbled, and their power a date;
For age comes to them, as it comes to all,
And hides them in the dust — ay, even now,
While but a breathing pause I dare to call,
I may not know if it will that allow!
Yet, sure of an eternal government
Above all change, I rest in calm content.

I sing no warrior's wrath, no deeds of arms,
Hero, or sage; no such adventurous voyaging
As from the shores of Thessaly set forth
In the old mythical Past; or when from Troy
The wisest of the Greeks came wandering,
By Circe's isle and fair Calypso's cave,
Back to his Ithaca; nor such sea-tossing
As vexed Æneas, pious but perfidious,
Sailing from Carthage with the funeral fires
Of burning Dido crimsoning sky and sea.

I may not sing th' angelic hosts of Heaven,
Nor Eden-life, whose song rings out as sweet,
As grand, to-day as when its glorious verse
Filled the blind poet's lips; nor a descent
To shadowy worlds of bliss and punishment;
Virgil and Dante sit, with laureled brows,
Before the gates of Hades, and their songs
Charm back all poesy would venture there.

Why do I summon thus the memories
Of famous verse to dwarf my later thoughts,
And cast upon my page the giant shadows
Of epic song? I have no marshaled hosts
Of glittering war to wage Homeric battles,
No gods or goddesses in cars of cloud
To mingle loves or angers with mankind:
Why conjure up their shapes?
Than these, my theme
Hath grander scope: I summon them to set
Beside the olden giants older Change;
To show how in the whirl of pitiless years
Gods, sages, heroes, poets, warriors — all
Are trodden into dust, while Change lives on,
As gathering strength from every ruined thing,
And making broad and broader, year on year,
One universal empire. 'Tis a theme
Greater than all the epics of the past;
But yet how poor my words can picture it:
A giant overtopping the great heads
Of mountains, dressed in patchwork of my verse!

The language of the myriad tongues of life,
The songs of all the melodies of earth,
The crash of discords — all that makes impression
On the receptive brain and soul of man,
His thirst for knowledge, his aspiring reach
To higher forms of truth, his doubts, his hopes,
His inspirations — how the soul is stirred
To gather these, and all in one great throb
Of meaning; make, of every voice, one voice,

One meaning out of many! But, alas,
Confusion overwhelms our understandings,
Too poor to hold together in one thought
The infinite! Yet, while around us lie
Limitless mysteries which we lack power
To analyze and gauge, the thought remains,
Although beyond full grasp of human mind,
That nature, in herself, is unity;
Her murmurs, thunders, whispers, but one voice—
One voice in all. What is it telling us?

How can we best interpret her great words?
Distinguish, in the crash of moving atoms,
The utterance of universal truth?—
How can we bend attentive ears to hear
True words of Nature's mystic whisperings,
Which she, the oldest of the Sphinxes, breathes
To patient listeners, who, in her great presence,
Should still be watchful of her faintest murmurs—
Listeners who ask her lips for revelations
In answer to the questionings of their souls?—
How catch the secrets that she half reveals,
And make the half a whole—when, all the while,
Our unrestrainable emotions cry,
And individual fortunes claim our thoughts
In the particular chances and quick changes
That fill the crowded paths of human life?

II

Time

Time! — On my mantel in a crystal case,
With steady beat, the shining pendulum swings;
I read the legend every instant brings,
Written in figures on my dial's face,
And call this Time. So go, with steady pace,
The silent hours; so, like a Siren, sings,
Lulling to sleep, the tyrant of all things,
The hungry feaster on each age and race.
How runs the legend? "Future, Present, Past;
Time swallows all." There is no solid land
Beneath my feet; no moment standeth fast:
All — all is flight. As slips the hour-glass sand,
So am I hurried on, while Memory wrings
Her hands in woe: I fly on Times's broad wings.

Dreamlike and vague, Imagination's vision
Of Nature's birth floats over Nature's facts
As springs the rainbow's arch above bright drops
That build its glittering bow,— dreamlike and vague,
Yet on material facts as strongly pillared
As some vast dome is set on colonnades
Of marble where each base hath sure foundation
In the deep-anchored, rocky ribs of Earth —
A vision picturing a history,
A bright refraction from material atoms
Touched by the sunlight of man's intellect
Till their bright track of color glows before him,

And builds a shining bridge to bear his thought
Upon its arch across the chasms of Time.
And man, whose waking dreams seem often phantoms
Of the great heart of ancient mystery
Now opening to him, climbs th' aerial stair;
Sets his small rule against the gleaming heavens;
Measures their vastness; or writes confidently
The daring visions brought by Thought and Fancy
To toiling Mind, the annals of his world.

His world — what is it?— that extent abroad
Outreaching sense can gather to his grasp.
He sees, about him, shifting atoms group,
And the groups cluster, aggregating mass;
Then dreams, conceptive, how in younger time,
In the wide region of the unconfined,
Nebulous matter gathered up in space;
Gases, condensing, grew to solid forms,
Shaping by laws inherent into orbs —
Stars, suns, earths, planets and their satellites.
Seeking to know the origin of all,
The key of Nature's puzzling intricacy,
The clue upleading to a Primal Force,
The might propelling atoms in their race
Through the illimitable paths of stars,
He finds philosophy of no avail;
In Nature's elements his utmost reach;
And the beyond — if he so far would dare —
An unknown country, dim in hazy distance,
Fancy's wide realm in which Imagination

Builds bright ideals, though each from the suggestion
Of a reality's more sober shape.
Looking abroad for Nature's moving powers
He only grasps results as atoms fly;
Finds Change the ruler of created things,
The doom of every wandering molecule,
The history of planets and of suns,
The ripple under which there stirs a law,
The burning car on which a meteor rides.

As daylight to our eyes, Time, to our thoughts,
Is a familiar; yet this daily theme,
This common, household word, is but a symbol
Set up to represent a larger thing
Than limited thought hath breadth to comprehend;
A wise device by which we strive to mark,
With careful numbers, all the flying scenes
That crowd successive on the narrow stage
Of our domain, this whirling, sunlit earth;
A measure — happy inspiration! — made
For the immeasurable. Ah, vain man!
How dare he seek to grasp so great a thing?
He cannot hope to give the boundless bounds,
Nor mark the margins of eternity!
Even Imagination, though it rise
A higher flight than Pegasus e'er soared,
Feels weary tremors stay its bold, broad wings
Ere yet is reached the ancient shore of Time,
Content at last to find some distant spot
Beyond the morning of man's memory
Where it may set, forsooth, its outmost line,

A measure only of conditioned reach.
Anticipation, sweeping through the years
Of coming time and eons yet to be,
Hath no prophetic power, or wizard forecast,
In the conceptive chambers of the brain,
To tell the end of Time.
No star of heaven
Was shining in the dark extent of space
When Time began, to be its natal light;
And when Time ends, the all-unnumbered host
Of gleaming lights that flash and glimmer forth
Through our vast dome of sky — ay! the white walls
Of heaven's great vault, the sky's star-masonry
Roofed grandly over us — will, with our earth,
Have filled their use, grown cold, and dull, and black,
And died a nameless, unrecorded death.
Time and the stars!— the ocean and a drop!—
The sea-shore and a single grain of sand!—
To gauge eternity by shine of stars
Were burning candles to light up the sun!
Days, months, years, centuries, are woven links
Of which an endless chain is ever made;
Our dear To-day, the last and nearest one,
Joined to the infinite our little Now.
One end supported by — we know not what,
Beyond the limit where far-darting thought,
Though plumed with fancies, fails its baffled flight,
The chain of Time is hung, down-reaching us
Through the mysterious vast of eons past.

Out of the darkness of an ancient night
Hang pendant ages lost in ebon depths
As they recede; but, on the latest link,
Catching the dazzling sunlight of the Present;—
One point of two abstruse infinitudes,
One light thus glimmering in immensity,
That walls it round about, and hangs above,
Waiting the flaming spark to pale and die;—
While clustering round that light, its fleeting day,
And bathing fragile lives in its sweet beams,
And dreaming this To-day, the one dear thing
For which primeval darkness was pushed back,
And Time's long chain thus kindly forged and hung,
Is man's weak race that labors, laughs, and weeps,
Or, stirred by busy fancies, builds a stair
Of fine imagination's gossamer
Far up the chain on which its day depends.
So, round a candle, flits an insect brood,
Blind, in its flickering glare, to all beside,
Oft scorching thin-spun wings in touch of flame,
But yet returning to the dazzling peril,
Happy to spend a life of briefest span
Buzzing about a smoking luminary,
The only refuge from surrounding night.

Time, thou art clothed with mystery's strange awe!
From cloudy gates in mythic fable hid
Thou hast come forth; before thee broadly stretch
Interminable galleries, through which

Thy armies march! We hear the noisy din,
The shouts and trampling of life's multitudes,
With which our voices mingle and are lost.
We look behind and see the scattered wrecks
Of age on age along the ruined Past
Until the lines of far perspective touch,
And all beyond is merged in misty points,
The periods of our knowledge — in advance,
And a great wall of darkness, densely black,
Moves as we move, but hides the forward country,
To which we go, from our impatient eyes —
Around, and the quick hurry of the march
Is seen on all: one sings rejoicing songs,
Another weeps; but all, with even step,
Keep pace to the great march; or, failing so,
Are left dead wrecks upon the track of years —
Dead wrecks on which, with back-turned eyes, we look
Awhile regretful; but the jostle soon,
And distance, break our fervent sorrowing
As the fierce hurry of the noisy Present
Drowns, with its clamor, low-voiced Memory.

From dreamless slumber in the silent land
Of embryos come forth the new, swift years
Laden with destinies of worlds and men,
Throw down their burdens in the flying Present,
Then leap into the Past. Soft twilight tints
Cast lingering lustre round each flitting form,
But darken soon into a normal night
As close the black, funereal curtains round

A perished age — save where, faint glimmering
Like an uncertain starlight, Memory's rays
Glance twinkling down amid the night of years;
But pierce not deepest shadows that lie thick
On far-off eras, like the black of pines
In a night landscape, hiding all beyond,
While nearer, half revealed in fitful light,
The valley lies, and sheen of winding stream
Like silver ribbon shining from its fringe
Of birchen clumps, o'er which the starlight flings
Mysterious charms of fairy witchery.

III

Memory

How shall I paint thy presence, Memory?
  Unto my thought thou art a stately queen;
  Upon thy broad, fair brow, a look serene
Of calm and intellectual majesty;
Within thy eyes a world of history;
  Compassion, kindness mingle in thy mien;
  Through all a high divinity is seen,
And presence grand of native royalty.
  Over thy face, expression's quickening play
Seems struggling with weird lines of mystery,
  But often flashes, like a sunbeam's ray,
Dissolving doubts and fears in certainty,
  Kindling the torch whose light will show the way
Through untried paths to new discovery.

  O Memory, let me not, with too faint praise,
Slander the greatness of thy ministry!
Without thee, man had been as poor a thing
As the blind worm, his type of feebleness.
Thou art the soul's awaking element,
The germ of intellect from which hath come,
Through many ages, all our mental growth.
Not in maturity — as from Jove's head
The wise Minerva sprang — came forth mankind,
But struggling upward in a toilful path
From lower levels. In that brutal age
When, crude and sluggish in his cloudy mind,

Man first essayed to guide life's troubled voyage
With wiser thought than native savagery,
The feeble rays of unripe Memory
Shone out alone to light his doubtful way;
But, in their beams, his undeveloped brain,
Thrilled with awaking powers, burst the dull husks
Of an obscuring ignorance, and grew
Up to the light; threw out each broader thought,
As the vine flings long tendrils, till at length
Grown up to pride of vain maturity,
He deems the patient Memory lesser part
Of present strength, and would degrade her rank
From guide and counselor to toiling slave.

With Memory's talisman we boldly press
Upon the track of the all-conqueror, Time;
Snatch, for an instant from his victories,
A trophy; but, alas, how soon to yield
It back, and learn we have not power to give
New life to his dead victims; nor to stay
A single file of all his countless host
That sweeps unhalting in eternal march.
But Memory hath a conjuror's wizard power
To bring, for a charmed moment, back again,
And rehabilitate with life, the Past —
The Past as painted on the myriad foldings
And tapestry of brain by artist hands
Of toiling elves that fill the chambered dome
Of thought with pictures numberless, but dim
And overhung till Memory draws the curtain,
And floods with gay or sombre light each scene.

Then, as by magic, every shape takes life,
And, in a marvelous vision, scene by scene,
Appears life's drama; nor a picture now,
For, from brain-paintings, every puppet leaps
To act his part of anger, sorrow, joy,
As it is written in the Book of Life.
A storm of recollections stirs the heart,
Aroused again by tumult of emotions
And quick pulsation of the thronging passions —
By love, hope, fear, pride, anger, jealousy,
Ambition and regret — by all the host
Of warrior passions, demons of dear sense,
And the angelic spirits of our virtues,
That throng tumultuous in the human heart,
Crowding its narrow gates and crooked halls
With mingled lines of marshaled combatants
Who win for us our grandest battle-fields,
Or stain the soul with tarnish of defeat.

Or memories come, each other following
Like the long swell of waves on summer seas,
Breaking in murmuring ripples at our feet;
But, while we muse and lose ourselves in visions
Of former happiness, the waves grow black,
Their gentle murmurs changed to angry roar
As the charmed sea chafes on its sounding shore,
And back upon us sweeps the frightful storm
That wrecked of old a fondly cherished hope.
Our pensive thoughts would linger with the hours
Friendship hath consecrated with its wealth
Of generous sympathy and noble help,

Or Love, with tenderer touch, made more than hallowed,
Stilling the heart's too passionate pulsations
To measures of remembered happiness.
But, like a spectre, often on such musings
May come some cruel, haunting shape to point
Where stand, unmasked of every specious doubt,
The Present heaped upon them, our misdeeds;
And what we would forget comes up again
Out of the Past the clearer from immersion
Within Time's sea that will not be a Lethe.
Through the hot flood-gates of the conscious heart,
Opened by hands of wakeful Memory,
Pour past emotions; and our acts spring forth
On this swift-moving flood, their own avengers,
Or bringing the returns a busy Present
May not have yielded to each modest virtue.

Or Memory may adorn her fairest scenes
With gay imaginations till they mock
Beautiful picturings of artist's fancies:
As skillful painter, by his coloring, throws
On the fair scene of field, and wood, and stream,
Such delicate charms that Nature is transformed
To a fictitious beauty, so Memory
Hath often gift of true artistic touch
To blend imaginings with sober shapes.
But charms of contemplation have been sung
In choicer numbers than may grace my page;
Then let me hasten on amid the whirl
Of my great theme; — yet ere I leave thy name,

Benignant Memory, I would essay
To mark th' uncertain limits of thy realm,
Tell how thy cloudy, visionary shores
Touch on the life-thrilled province of the Present.

Remembrance brings a train of captive facts
Within the pale of judgment; builds a base
On which the intellect may set its structures,
Or Fancy rear her quaintly-fashioned shapes;
Hands down, from predecessors, heritage
Of science, literature, and mental toil;
Presents the broad experience of the Past,
Rigid in lines of immobility,
By which to shape each formless circumstance
Whose grasp creates the all-important Present.

As the great volumes of the Past are filled
With the unchanging print of actions done,
We turn a page or two, and read the while
Our acts are written there. We fain would change
Or blot the words where Folly's reckless touch
Or secret, or acknowledged, sin has set
Its soiling marks on the accusing page;
But find, alas! the Past cannot be changed.
In ancient times they wrote on leaves of brass,
Or golden tables, some important thing;
And, in our day, we cut the granite's face,
Or model metal into pictured shapes,
In the vain hope to tell a future age
Our thoughts, or acts, successes, or mishaps.
The tooth of rust will gnaw the giant limbs

Of our Colossus, and our Sphinx may hide
In shattered features what we bid her tell;
Nor leaves of brass or gold, nor shapes of stone,
Will long endure; each may record untruth;
But fact fails not because the record fails;
Nor shifts from ill to good though sculptures tell
In deep-cut letters monumental lies.

While Memory yields a never-ceasing store
Of recollections, the great power to act
Is vested in each rapidly flying instant,
So brief a space no measure marks its breadth.
Into this breathless moment leaps a thought
Prompting the deed which cannot be undone.
And so we set our acts along the lines
Of circumstance; so grasp impending facts;
So do the deeds that bring us honor, shame,
Our best of happiness, or worst regret.
Upon the future we may speculate;
In memory dwell upon the fading past;
One flitting instant only is our own:
The Present stamps a seal on every act,
Will stand unbroken through eternity.

IV

Transfigurations

How many an eye, O burning lamps of night,
  Hath looked for comfort to your distant spheres,
  Seeking to calm the present's haunting fears
By the pure talisman of your sweet light! —
Calm stars? Ah, no! Although serenely bright,
  A twinkling demon in each ray appears,
  A fiend that mocks at sorrows and at tears,
And laughs derisive at the heart's affright —
  The demon, Change; and skies are not serene:
Their silent beauty is a friendly guile,
  False, for those lights, so sweetly, softly seen,
Are monsters roaring in a fierce turmoil;
  Yet each huge orb, as through wild change it flies,
  With peaceful beauty shimmers in our skies.

  When by the action of Primeval Force
Creation was; when laws began to move
The thinnest forms of matter in wide space
That thrilled with impulse of awaking Nature;
When out of nothing — wonder of miracles! —
Throughout infinity of space awoke
The law-poised atoms — woke to spin and fly
Unresting ever in the countless years,
Pushed on, as if across infinity;
When, closing up, the neighbor elements
Together drew, to social union driven
And definite shape by instinct of that force

That wrought the fabric of each balanced orb,
And framed the architecture of the skies,
Then Change had its beginning; nor hath known
Leisure or stay since that eventful hour:
Nor hath this restless agency of Fate,
This tyrant of the subject universe,
Suffered one weary atom to have rest.

Agent of Fate? if so, perhaps a purpose
Benign is in each seeming-cruel whirl
Of Change, and every phase is healthful growth
To a propitious end. But let us pause
And listen to the marvelous din of movement;
Behold the figures shift, and blend, and fade;
Then, if we will, their ultimate meanings guess,
And seek the clue through the bewildering maze.

The ruler of our system — to whose heart
The mystic ties of gravitation bind us;
About whose kingly orb, in circling paths,
Journey his planetary family,
Cherished and warmed by life-bestowing beams,
And strong upheld — is not exempt from change.
The patient watcher at the telescope
Sees, on the sun's bright orb, huge graven marks
That come and go, pits, deep and inky black,
Changing their shapes, and drifting o'er his face —
Sees on his photosphere the impress of force,
The boiling up of incandescent flames,
Sudden combustions darting into space
Thousands of leagues, falling again like rain,
To be absorbed into his molten breast;

Nor to repose, for the tumultuous throes
Which vex that monstrous bosom cast them forth
High-hurled, as shot from angry crater-mouths.
Mountains of flaming hydrogen arise,
Each vaster than a hundred earths like ours,
Showing, like saw-teeth, on his mighty disk;
And sink, and rise again, fringing his edge
With bright corona, many-tinted fires,
Painting fierce action and prodigious change.
Apparent motions of the starry host
Have taught sky-gazers that the sun stays not,
Fixed on his fiery center to one spot,
Immovable amid the unceasing whirl;
But that, across the boundless sea of space,
His system journeys toward flashing deeps
Alive with star-light; yet between whose fires,
Open vast galleries for his great march,
While still the star-deeps brightly flash beyond,
Nor wait his coming; but each sphere, propelled
On orbit large, sweeps on its silent path —
Silent to us because unmeasured space
Muffles the roar of monstrous chariot wheels
And frightful clamor of each stellar flight;
While all the lines of labyrinthian track,
Traced upon ether by the flight of stars,
The broad handwriting of the heavenly host,
Are weird, mysterious cryptograms of Change.

As the Sun changeth, Earth, his satellite,
By smaller marks, reveals the same great hand
Whose touch perturbs the blazing King of Day.

How manifold the changes of the Earth
Since it was gathered up amid the heavens,
An infant world, and held in young Time's lap!—
But wherefore young? Nor young, nor old, was Time
When, moving inward through impregnate space,
Nebulous cloudlings, from their ether homes,
Drew them together to create a world
Of much attenuated elements
And gases thin; or when, much wrought by force,
And fashioned into being, this new world —
A future home of animated life,
A garden-spot for man to cultivate,
Puzzling entanglement of many laws —
Joined the great march of planetary spheres;
Sailed in determined path along the heavens.
But Time, grim nurse, took no more heed of it
Than doth the sea of some bright-tinted shell
Rolled up by murmuring tide on diamond beach,
And flashing with gay brilliance as each wave
Breaks on its lustrous curves in sparkling drops
That cannot quench the gleaming opal fire.

Ever from hour of her nativity
Hath restless Change pursued swift-flitting shapes
Whirled roundabout the Earth's rotundity;
White, flaming fires condensed to solid mass
Till, round her poles, long, sunless winters freeze;
The cooling crust, uptorn by inward throes,
That greatly moved her heaving, fervent breast,
Hath pierced the sky with cloud-capped mountain-
chains;

The seas have left their old, accustomed beds
To pour their floods upon the sinking land;
From out the deepest caves in ocean depths
Great mountains, long submerged, have reared
their heads,
Lifting to laughing daylight mighty peaks
That now rejoice to catch the sun's first rays,
The glowing heralds of each new day's dawn;
Sea-grottos, where the shark once wooed his love
Deep under the blue tops of curling waves,
Are now green valleys where the patient cow
Chews the sweet grasses, and Arcadia smiles,
While summer airs bucolic idyls sing.

Change oft transmutes the varying forms of earth
With a strange alchemy. The troubled atoms
Hurry, at call of weird affinities,
Or by the might of a subjecting stroke,
To new alliances as brief as new;
For scarcely are they joined ere they dissolve,
While the quick doom of matter seems to be
A ceaseless agony of dissolution
And shifting shape; and life and death are names
Of phases in the flitting cycles of Change.
The outward forms of things inanimate —
If aught inanimate exists on earth —
As time goes on are wrought by constant powers,
Shaping the contour of the spherical Earth,
Rounding with equal care each rain-drop's globe,
Dispersing it in so small particles
It paints the sky with floating tints of beauty,

Till Nature rounds again its crystal sphere
To launch it forth, at an electric signal,
From the low bank of dark, portentous clouds.
Form dies to give new birth; successive changes
Clasp, each the next, a closely-woven chain:
The animation of organic structure
Runs a brief course through phases numberless
To stop abruptly at the change of death.
No shape of earth so firm, but at the touch
Of wizard Change, as by the magic stroke
Of an enchanter's wand, it melts away;
Resistless might is in this giant hand
To crush together, or to rend apart,
The much-vexed matter. Yet each element
Hath an undying life; no change can lose
Its substance, or destroy its entity.
Death is the action of organic laws;
But when decay dissolves a concrete form,
Or quicker rupture strikes organic life,
The death of one foretells another's birth;
From Phenix-pyre undying matter springs,
Its atoms grouped anew in tint and shape,
Death but the withered skin a serpent sheds,
The recollection of a perished form.
So from its broken chrysalis comes forth
A butterfly to mock the hues of sunshine,
And flutter brightly o'er its empty case.

The works of man sink crumbling back to dust
From which, with painful toil, his hand had raised
them;

The works of Nature, stronger built and vast,
Share the same fate, resolve and fall and change:
The highest Alp that lifts its giant mass
Above the clouds, stability's vain type,
Is beat by storms, and gnawed by countless years,
Till, piece by piece, wild torrents drag it down,
Or wilder winds its fragments launch in air.
Man sees the myriad-agéd mountains sink,
But scarce can stay to moralize thereon;
For, while he thinks, he groweth old, himself,
Feels his own atoms fail; writes hastily
"Life's lesson's Change!" — drops wearily his pen,
And points the sentence with the stop of death.

Nor man alone, but all organic forms
Of loose material, that Dame Nature breeds
Into prolific life, the circuit make
Of birth, maturity, decay, and death:
The countless tribes of animated things
That fondly cling to Earth's maternal breast
Die on the lap in which they had their birth;
While vegetation's mantle, wrapped around
The mother of all organisms, is green,
Profuse, luxuriant, ripe — then fades and falls
In withered piles of decomposing death,
Closing a circuit of organic change,
And leaving Earth, the nourisher, stripped of all,
To shiver, with bared bosom, at the wrath
Of Winter till young Spring, with touch of sunshine,
Revives her, and a wealth of life comes forth
From her prolific lap — no miracle,
But law, more admirable than miracle.

The thoughtful student, poring o'er the past,
Can read, on rock-bound ribs of Earth, her story:
Broad glacier-marks, the fossil shell, and leaf
Are each an illustration of past eras,
A picture printed in the Book of Years;
While every order of successive layers
Of earth deposits, or their wild disorder
Where some fierce epoch tossed the broken ruins
In varied slopes, or piled on edge the strata
Thousands of calmer years combined to build,
Are records how Earth's changing shapes have moved,
The engraven annals of the centuries,
Teaching his mind the broad historic truth,
That Nature, by divinity of law,
Hath wrought so carefully throughout the ages,
By this unceasing change, that what we see,
And what we are, this all-important Present,
Is but the outgrowth of the ended years,
And every period of the wondrous Past
Hath marvelously pointed down to us
As we point onward to a coming Future.
Despite of time, a close relationship
Exists between the first created germ
And the last life prolific Earth hath borne.

His mind goes backward from this elder day,
And wanders in a reconstructed Past;
Pre-Adamitic visions rise before him,
The ghostly images of former times:
He sees the gloomy foliage of fern-forests
Dark overhead; enormous stems and fronds,

As of a giant world, wave in the wind,
And roar as their high branches swing and chafe;
His breath is stifled by the hot earth's reek;
Rank, sulphurous fumes are stinging in his nostrils;
Pushing among the mighty stems of ferns,
Or splashing noisily in vaporous seas,
Move frightful forms of animated life,
The saurian and the monstrous pachyderm —
These hideous creatures scare away the vision,
And, when he dreams again, the scene is changed
To the chill whiteness of the Age of Frost:
Now bright before him the cold glaciers shine,
And one long Winter wraps the hapless world—
A frozen world; white cliffs hang o'er ravines
Of the same ghastly hue, save where the flashing
Of weird auroras gleams along the snows,
Painting their desolation with the tints
Of wild diablery. Adown the sides
Of the precipitous hills no torrents dash;
No purple banks of clouds sail in the sky;
Water exists but in its crystal forms,
In phantom snow-wreaths flung o'er hills of ice;
No pine-trees skirt the mountains' gleaming heights;
No oak-clumps in the valleys — all is bare:
Even the shadows, with their spectral gloom,
Bring no relief to pained and dazzled eyes;
It is a dead world in a frozen shroud.
Shivering he drives away the dreary picture;
Nor dares to summon up another age,
Lest yet more horrid visions should appear.

V

Mother-Earth

O Mother-Earth, so great thy family
That little seems the care thou giv'st to one!
Brood after brood thy countless children come
Out of thy teeming ripe fecundity!
To thy maternity I make my plea:
Is thy great mother-heart all cold and numb?
Thou hast a thousand voices; be not dumb!
Or is it that we misinterpret thee?
And that, indeed, thy thousand voices tell,
Thou hast a mother-heart that loveth well
Thy children, all the hosts of life that cling
To thee? Ah, yes; thy children know thee not,
How fondly thou dost love each living thing —
All — all thy mother-gifts how oft forgot!

What changes yet remain, O Earth? what fate,
What fortunes, hidden in the future, wait
To make thy age more noble than thy past?
Or to extinguish all thy ancient honors?
We fain would wish thee greater fortunes, Earth;
For while thou draggest climbing spirits down,
Compelling us to yield to that gross law
By which thou drawest to thy ponderous breast
All matter kindred in its birth with thee,
Thou hast our love: with all our dearest hopes,
Our largest thoughts, our loves, our happiness,
There mingles what is so allied to thee
We dare not learn how close the kinship lies.

What changes yet remain? As it hath been
Throughout the Past, must still the Future be?
Always new phases? the evolving plan,
Of which thou art the appointed agency,
Steadfastly moving on?
There was no sage
In thy first hour to plot a horoscope
From the portents of the bright, watchful host
Of sister orbs that shone upon thy birth:
If we would read thy fate, it may be found
Figured in phases of successive change
Upon the Past; and every phase a cipher
In which is written shunless destiny.
But our best science, groping in the dark,
Can only chance upon some plainer parts
Of a great scheme which we would fain piece out,
Or wisely build with vain philosophy;
Yet find our largest plans too small to reach
Beyond ourselves, while stretching far away
Are vast infinities, within whose depths
Our grandest figures sink and disappear.

Will still conserving laws hold, in firm grasp,
Thee and thy fortunes? or will Change unloose
Thy bonded matter? bid freed elements
Fly off to join them with the neighbor orbs?
Or flit, blind meteors, rayless in the path
Of a wrecked world? Or will the hour arrive
When, fading into nothing, vanishing
Like dream forgotten with the morning sun
Thou wilt be lost, at once plucked out of space,

Engulfed in darkness like a sinking ship,
No trace remaining in the empty void
To bear the record "There was once a world"?
The startled heart cries out "This cannot be!"
Forgetting that a greater wonder was
When, through the slumbering halls of vacancy,
The first call rang that broke eternal silence,
And filled infinity with countless worlds.

Ask we of Science what the years will bring
To Mother-Earth? She, the inflexible,
Can build, from prophet-shadows of the Past,
The phantom of a corresponding Future:
There is no void; the vast profound of space
Is filled with ether; our terrestrial ship
Cuts this thin substance as a steamer cuts,
With her sharp prow of steel, the ocean waves;
Plows through a medium so attenuate
Our envelope of thin, encircling air
Strikes it as would a sphere of hardest steel
The thinnest air. Yet this ethereal sea,
That laves infinity's most distant shores,
Vast as eternity itself can be,
Quivers elastic with the waves of light
And its companion, heat; contains, within
Its infinite diffusion, agencies
Of gravitation, of electric force,
And all the potent energies of life;
Within its well-knit substance firmly holds
The countless systems of the universe,
And matter is complete, one great machine,

Endless and voidless, simple and complex,
Throbbing as if endued with conscious life,
One organism built of many parts
Of which our earth is but a molecule.
This monstrous creature, framed without the bounds
Of space, combines within one entity
The sum of all: its tireless energy
Compels all movement with exhaustless force:
Translation, heat, light, organism, life,
Its varied forms of action.
But our Earth,
The molecule, the atom of this thing —
Leaving the whole, to watch a little part —
What is the atom's fate? The energy,
Propelling now our globe through ether-depths,
Will be resolved by variable degrees
Into the form of heat. The viewless path,
On which we move, obstructs our chariot wheels;
The fires of friction slowly burn up force;
Out of the ether fairy hands are stretched
To stay our journey; nor are stretched in vain;
Still we go on, as heedless of all this,
But in a smaller course. The time must come —
Though all our figures work not out the date —
When these faint frictions will so change our march
That solar gravity, preponderant,
Will draw, by its centripetal constraint,
Our Earth, in lessening circles spinning round,
Into the fervor of its fierce embrace,

Mingling our little with its mighty mass,
The fused Earth-molecule dissolved in fire.

It is but working the well-ordered plan
That gathered up the nebulæ in space;
Fashioned the floating matter into orbs;
Drew in those orbs to merge them into suns;
To hurl in contact their enormous globes,
Transmuting speed to heat. In that mad hour
When all the movement of unnumbered years
Is loosed in flame, a vast expansive force,
Developed of diffusive power of heat,
May hurl dissevered matter back again
Into the limitless from whence it came
By circling journeys of the ended cycle.
Then the thin nebulæ will fill again
The long-deserted deeps of ether space,
And the new Cycle, leaping into birth
From a dead brother's grave, commence its march,
Primordial atoms gathering into mass,
To fashion worlds within the pregnant skies.

So may we follow an imagined plan,
Working from laws whose secrets, half-disclosed,
Tempt us to guess at what remains unlearned —
Yet doubtful of our steps; for it may chance
That, while presumptuous Science builds her scheme,
What we yet know may bear, to the unknown,
Too small proportion, and our architecture
May, from a false foundation, slip away

Like a fair city swallowed by the Earth,
That, in volcanic rupture, widely gapes.
Often our best imaginings appear,
In dawning light of new discovery,
False as fantastic figures of a dream,
Futile as prophecy of raving madness
That dresses every wild and whirling fancy
In the material garb of sober fact.

VI

Ocean

What glitters, Ocean, in thy bosom bright?
  Not starlight only gleaming on thy waves:
  How many a sunken fleet, in thy deep caves,
Sends glimmering spectres through the dusky night,
Weird phantoms rising to the realm of light!
  Behold the crescent Moon, as now she laves
  Her in thy tremulous flood, shine over graves
Of myriads sacrificed to thy dread might!
  Ah, sailor, tell me not the sea's strange glow
Hath natural cause! I read, in dancing lights
  That leap and flicker in the waves below,
A legend written by the ocean-sprites —
  A legend full of wonders sad and strange,
  And pitiful disasters of sea-change.

  Blue Ocean shouts in noisy thunderings,
Or whispers, in low murmurings, of change;
Nor ever rests; but moves from ebb to flood,
From flood to ebb, a monster's half-day pulse.
By light winds fanned, its curling ripples smile;
By tempests tossed, its billows threat the sky;
A fickle element, its smiles deceive;
And hungry waters swallow the deceived —
A type and agent of capricious Change —
The lovely bosom of tranquillity —
Marvel of majesty and Nature's might —
The level plain on which rich commerce floats —
A boiling whirlpool to engulf great ships.

Regardless of old Ocean's smiles or frowns,
His smooth tranquillity or white-capped rage,
A stately steamship crosses the broad sea,
Day after day swift-sailing into the East
Upon the oft-cut track of many keels.
Hurrying on her course, with tremulous thrill
Like pulse of life at each strong engine-stroke,
She seems some mighty monster of the deep
With breath of smoke polluting sky above,
And fins of steel disturbing seas below,
That backward gleam along her course for miles,
Foaming and eddying, a huge dragon-track.

The restless belt of the Atlantic waves
Is traversed, and a few safe hours would place
The ocean-voyagers in their destined port;
The night is on the sea; mingling with dreams
That hover over sleepers in the ship
The turbulent waves join their unceasing din:
The deep-toned voices of the ocean swell,
Chanting the mighty anthem of the sea —
Ill-fated ship, it is thy dirge they sing!
Behold above the tossing waves a light!
A ship? No: listen to the thundering roar!
It is the sound of breakers. Ah, too late
Their dreadful warning comes! A heavy crash
As if the earth upon its orbit stopped —
A frightful, stunning pause. The mountain waves
Roll high above — a moment hang — then fall.
The boasted work of man's skilled handicraft
Breaks like a nutshell in the mighty surge,

And, when the waves roll back, it lies, a wreck.
Hoist out the boats! — No boat can swim the surge
Of that tumultuous sea. The shattered masts
Fall crashing o'er the side; the waves leap up
To clutch them with a thousand curling hands
Of giant strength, and, howling, bear them off
To tear in pieces on the pointed rocks;
The planks are stripped, like ribbons, from the decks;
Cabins and bulwarks — all are swept away;
The great ribs crushed, and widely torn apart.
A wild, mad hiss as deluged fires are quenched —
The howl of winds — the frightful dash of waves -
The ship in pieces — water everywhere —
Men, women, children, drowned within their berths,
Or, shrieking, torn from sea-swept decks away.
No time to call on God: the wild of waters
Greedily swallows into thundering deeps
Each fear-chilled heart that wakes from dreams of peace
To die too noisily for thoughts of prayer.

Though the rough waves toss up their helpless prey;
Though winds as pitiless howl cruel dirge;
Though stretched neglected on the ocean-ooze
The bodies of the drowned, uncared for, lie;
Yet the stilled hearts know nothing of all this:
The lost sea-voyagers have sailed o'er the brink

Of mortal life — one quick, tumultuous change
Hath landed them upon that other shore
Along whose edge mysterious sea-fogs hang.
An hour ago the ship was ocean's lord;
But, like a slave, the treacherous monster rose,
And crushed with cruel blows his crippled lord.

VII

War

Ancient thou art, O War! Far off, I see
  Thy monstrous shape in mystic glory clad —
  A glory making fierceness wildly glad
In epic song and mythic history.
Not all thy widow tears, Andromache,
  Nor weeping of the Trojan women sad,
  Can drown the tumult and excitement mad
That crown Achilles with the majesty
Of glorious victory. Hereditary,
  Despite of gentler teaching, still remain
The embers of our early savagery;
  And all the growth of mind hath yet the stain
Of that wild passion of heroic joy
  That thrilled Greek warriors on Troy's battle-
    plain.

  In nature's sure decay, in accident,
Infectious breath of pestilence, the wreck
Upon the sea, the earthquake's yawning mouths,
Th' electric bolt descending from the cloud —
In all, humanity finds death's broad change;
But yet must needs invent a larger means,
A quicker way, to reach the end of life.
Upon the field in marshaled ranks arrayed,
And long, opposing lines of gleaming steel,
Two armies meet with din of cruel war
And sulphurous fires that light the path to death.
When from resounding throats the cannon hurl

Through shattered ranks of men an iron storm;
When beating drums and flying banners lead
Long, glittering lines to War's red Feast of Blood;
That demon revels in the battle-smoke;
Laughs at the rattling sound of rifle-shots,
Bursting of shells, and crash of cannonade.
Gay plumed companion of the fatal one,
When thy red hand is raised, Time sits him down,
Drops his sharp scythe, to cast admiring eye
Upon thy quicker work, while Pity weeps
O'er agonies of victims struck by thee;
Slain for thy frightful hour of vampire-life,
That thou may'st drink the streams of flowing blood
And revel in a carnival of Death!

Triumphal strains may sing of hero-deeds,
Gilding with specious lustre War's fierce face;
Thousands of voices loudly shout in praise
Of those who come with laurel garlands crowned
And victory's proud triumph in their eyes,
Forgetful in that hour how many deaths
Have bound the chaplets on the victors' brows,
How many homes and hearts are desolate.
The shining crowns of laurel leaves will fade;
The noisy songs of triumph soon will cease;
While grief remains to wring a parent's heart,
Sorrow to pale a widow's hollow cheeks,
Suffering to hush the laugh on orphan lips —
The victims' tears outlast the victors' joys.

War is an ogre devastating nations,
Seizing their youth and strength to feed his life,

Leaving behind him desolated lands
Where only Famine and pale Woe remain
To weep the rapine of his cruel greed —
An ogre of more cruelty than Legend
Hath ever pictured in her tales of Eld —
A demon of more evil than the worst
That Satan led in war against high Heaven.

VIII

Mutation of Races

I dreamed I sat upon an ancient mound;
  And mused of the old dwellers in the land,
  Who heaped the earth at some strange god's command,
Building with pious hands this sacred ground.
While thoughtfully I mused, without a sound
  A figure rose, and stood with outstretched hand,
  Whose mournful gesture I could understand.
My blood grew chill! At length, my voice I found:
  "Hast thou appeared, unearthly one, to tell
The buried secrets of thy olden day,
  And sad disasters that thy race befell?
O speak, dim figure, and thy errand say!"
  I heard no voice from that companion dread,
  But night-winds whispered vaguely overhead:

  Man dies in full maturity of years,
Or earlier stricken by the hand of Death;
But leaves no vacant place: his progeny,
Inheritors of what he once called his,
Assume his place, and sit in ancient seats
Of many ancestors till, called in turn
To follow their dead fathers, they give up,
With many groans perhaps, what use hath made
Familiar, and depart to shadowy lands
Of their belief; and so the race goes on —
Not always: even the races of mankind,
From natural order of inheritance,

Lapse into change. From heritage of lands
Their ancestors had held a thousand years
A people pass; nor leave untenanted
The country that forgets them. On the track
Of the outgoing race the incomer treads;
And soon his busy life may fill the land
So noisily, its din drowns dying legends
Remembered only for a few brief years,
Lingering, with shadowy recollections, round
Secluded spots and lone, forsaken graves.

Nor must we make a weary pilgrimage
To distant lands to find an ancient grave
Where we can sit and muse of Time and Change
And a lost race; the graves are near at hand:
In grassy vales through which the watercourse
Winds its green track, meandering to the sea,
Are vestiges of a forgotten people —
Great mounds, with many-centuried oaks, chance-lodged,
Of later growth upspringing from green slopes,
Carefully shaped, the work of old-time zealots,
Covering the earthen altars that yet hold
The ashes of their sacerdotal fires.
On craggy hill-tops run the broken lines
Of scarce distinguishable forts o'er which
Now blooms the wild rose; or, in later days
Of hazy autumn, loaded grape-vines hang
Their purple bunches ripening in the sun.
Here once the lines of battle fiercely stormed,
And red blood flowed where now red roses bloom.

Or more remote, in forests of Copan,
Are ancient sites of ruined, stone-built cities,
Whose crumbling walls and statues — oft well-poised,
Or fallen half-buried in the rank, black soil —
Greet with mysterious mockery every eye
That looks upon their marble solitude;
While each grim figure, with time-mouldered lines,
Seems striving still to tell its marvelous tale.
These mounds, hill-fortresses, and chiseled statues
Are antique monuments of a dead Past —
A people lost.

In the forgotten time
A nameless race set up its dwellings here;
Here gathered into nations; tilled the lands
Tamed down from nature's wildness by the toil
Of these dead husbandmen; here clustered homes
And here grew up affections fervent, pure;
And worthy lives were lived in that old time;
And human passions wrought for good or ill
As Virtue won her crown of sweet content,
Or Vice upreared a hissing serpent-head —
If we may judge this lost humanity
By the known records of historic man;
But lost are race, and name, and history,
The ancient annals of the Western World.
Here were enacted deeds perhaps as great
As those recorded of the storied East,
Scenes of sublimity we may not know
Unless imagination penetrate
The mouldered dust of buried centuries,

And build again decay and death to life.
What wild, strange tales might their grim spectres tell
If they could raise themselves from ancient graves,
Rear up erect long-crumbled skeletons,
And fill each hollow bosom with a voice!
Here once was prosperous life, in whose best day,
With smiling skies above, broad, ripening fields,
Bright hopes and promises, no bodement told
Of danger, gloomy days, impending death.
Ere yet the shadow of the coming end,
Darkening the beautiful to anxious eyes,
Had crept upon their landscape, this lost race
Built time-defying marble into cities,
And cut engraven statues into shapes
With careful chiselings of cultured art,
In the vain hope to tell a future age
The greatness and the glory of their race.
Vain hope! How false had seemed the prophecy
If some Cassandra of a western Troy
Had raised her shrill voice in its populous streets,
And cried: "In vain! in vain! A time will come
When none can read our sculptured monuments,
Nor find, in one lone mound or fortress-hill,
The story hidden in their long decay!
Our deeds of might, worth, wisdom, wit, and skill
Shall all be buried in forgotten graves;
And strangers marvel — in these marble streets,
Then desolate — who builded these carved stones!"
But none of all the city's thousands then
Had heeded her mad cries. As they beheld
The land's prosperity and teeming life;

Saw on the river-highways busy fleets,
Bands of corn-planters toiling in the fields,
Swart workers delving metals from the mines,
The stately chiefs, the marshaled ranks of war,
The city-builders, and the artisans,
The pious hosts that worshiped at the mounds,
Or buried there the ashes of a king,
A wise philosopher, a sainted priest —
All this confirmed their greatness; and no doubt
Disturbed their minds, that their great name should perish,
Nor live enduring as their stone-built temples.
Imagination so may picture them,
But they have left us no historic trace;
No living type descended from those days
Of might and pride; no weak, degenerate child
To boast the glories of his ancestry;
No record of a name, or law, or deed;
No story of the last catastrophe
That brought oblivion to their stricken race.

Yet this may be our fate. Such physical change
As in the eras of geology
Hath worked disturbance of Earth's broken crust,
Contagion, failing nature, or a star
Erratic hurled upon our sober sphere —
A hundred causes could be found would lead
To our destruction. As they passed away,
So we, who have no more security
Of life than they; no surer heritage
Of Earth; no stronger grasp of future days;

Our life, mortality, estate, the same:
Like them the atoms that a mighty Hand
Scatters abroad, or kindly gathers up.
Like lost Atlantis, in one whelming crash
Our land may sink beneath a raging sea,
Whose waters, foaming with volcanic fires,
May boil above a buried continent;
And millions perish, with one drowning cry,
In death so swift they scarce may feel the blow,
As died the nations of the Atlantian Isles.

Whate'er the cause, the builders of the mounds
Passed from the land, and left their vacant homes,
Cities, and lands for other tenantry.
Where by the stream or on the breezy hills
The dwellings of the older people fell
In slow decay, the savage Indian built
His birchen hut; and roamed along the vales,
And over the smooth sides of sacred mounds;
Hunted, with primitive bow, the forest game,
Or, with rude tackle, drew the river's wealth;
But hastened from the hunt in forest glades,
Or river fishing, to a cruel war
With neighbor tribes, and feasted wild desires
In fierce excitement of barbaric strife.
No records tell us when or whence he came;
Mythical legends only left us now
To sharpen the deep shadows that surround
His coming and first dwelling in the land.
He may have come in peace, or in fierce war;
With overwhelming numbers his wild tribes

May have extinguished the more cultured people
Who carved their statues and built marble cities
Where now is wilderness in Yucatan;
And who had raised, with pious hands, their altars
In the more northern valleys; but at last,
In desperate extremity of peril,
Had stretched defenses on the craggy hill-tops,
O'er which, victorious, fierce barbarians swarmed
When civilization perished in the slaughter,
Down-trodden there with art and all the culture
Of many peaceful, prosperous centuries,
In the tumultuous rush of multitudes.
Exterminated thus by savage war —
Or yet more miserably by fatal pest;
Or combination both of war and pest —
They left the Indian master of the land,
And only ruined monuments to tell
Their race had ever been.
From east to west,
From Arctic winter to Antarctic ice,
The Indian tribes filled the wide continents,
Dreamless of Fate yet slumbering in the East,
But soon to pour along Atlantic shores
A locust horde; before whose fatal hosts
Their race must wither, yielding life and land
To pitiless invaders, till at last
Swept from their homes — nor mound, nor ruin left
To tell of rudest savagery —
They yielded place unto another race.

In a new dawn of knowledge there was one
Looked, with clear sight, over vast wastes of ocean,

Pictured broad countries set in equipoise
On the round earth, the far antipodes
To the known East, a new world in the West.
The daring voyager, whose clear-seeing mind
Had studied Nature in her many forms,—
Had dared to doubt what all the world believed;
Had dared believe what doubted all the world —
Put forth his barks to sea; steered to the west;
Sailed o'er the trackless blue to that far land
He oft had seen in his prophetic dreams,
Waiting his coming on the ocean's edge.
That land he found, and back returning told
His wondrous story to the admiring world.
A thousand vessels sailed upon the track
Of the bold sailor who had shown the way,
Landing their freights of men of eastern race
In forest-homes of Indians of the West.
Their races could not mingle; step by step,
Each step disputed, was the red man driven
Back from the ocean — back until his path
Ending in mountains, deserts, or the sea,
He could retreat no more: here, brought to bay,
And tearing foremost hunters, died at last
Contending for possession of a spot
Where he might lay his weary body down,
And where his bones might rest — but not in peace:
The farmer's plow, upturning forest mould,
Invades with sacrilege an Indian's grave.

Thus hath the land been peopled, and grim Time
Beheld the actors of Life's drama shift:

One race its exit make, another come;
But through all changes still the acts go on.
Who lived before the builders of the mounds
We cannot know, yet doubtless man was here.
The silent relics of that early race
Speak without words, as doth the ancient Sphinx
Who sits embedded in the sands of Nile;
And if one word could stir the moveless lips
Of Eygpt's gods, or statues of Copan,
Those stony mouths would surely utter "Change!"

IX

The Fall of Empires

The might of empire — in its days of pride
A massive rock on which all waves may beat;
A tower of strength that nothing can defeat;
Brightness of glory that must still abide —
How long? Till fortune's all-subduing tide
Doth turn; the Fates its thread of life complete.
Change is a common chance that all must meet;
In greatest pride doth sure destruction hide.
And must we read this lesson in the Past:
Because old empires of the world decayed
Is power a pageantry that cannot last?
Must splendor of dominion surely fade?
And all the great endowments of to-day,
Must they, like ancient empire, pass away?

One day, upon his throne, Chaldea's king
Sat with a clouded brow, and bade them bring
From temple of the star-god, Baal, a priest,
That, from black gloom, the king might be released;
And, when he came, his deep-lined face expressed
A withered age; him, thus the king addressed:

"They tell me you are wise; then answer me,
What is this vague, o'erhanging mystery
That clothes my life with strange and sad annoy,
Drowning in my pained bosom every joy?
Behold my glory! This proud Babylon,
My seat of empire, sees my conquests won
From half the world: the city that defied

Armies and nations, yielded ancient pride
Before my car; the wealth of Tyrian shrines
And golden palaces around me shines;
And all Assyria's glory decks me now,
Bound with Chaldea's empire on my brow.
Babylon, queen of cities, is my own;
And I have palaces, each one alone
Rich as a kingdom; female slaves as fair
As whitest ivory, their thick-tressed hair
Of woven gold — but these no joys impart.
Priest, can you cure the sorrow of my heart?"

As caverned waters, deeply gurgling, flow,
Came the priest's answer solemnly, and slow:

"The astral records of two thousand years
Are in our temple, and a thousand seers
Study their figures, tracing careful lines
Of every star that on Chaldea shines.
Upon these tabled figures of the past
Seven stars their ruling influence have cast:
When grew Chaldea's empire, widely spread,
With growing light the seven blazed overhead;
But when her fortunes waned, pale grew the seven,
Hiding their brilliance in the deeps of heaven.
O king, alas! though, like a beacon fire,
These stars proclaimed the fall of vanquished Tyre,
Yet from that hour, their lustre grew less bright,
Dimly retreating in the arch of night
Until Chaldea's eagle-visioned seers
Catch not the twinkle of their distant spheres,

While hostile hosts look down with eyes of gloom,
And angry heavens declare a coming doom.
O king, Chaldea's twenty centuries
Hang o'er her as a hundred winters freeze
My agéd blood! Thy glory is the light
Of sunset glow now fading in a night
Of darkness, an enduring night whose morn
Is in a distant time, a future dawn
Too far for prophecy;— more near I read,
In blood-red stars, the victories of the Mede,
And lost Chaldea. King, thy sorrow strange
Is the dark shadow of impending Change."

And so the priest departed; and the king
Tore from his brow Chaldea's monarch ring,
And wandered forth in brain-distracted mood,
Eating the grass with brutal habitude;
And when a few inglorious years were o'er
Chaldea's ancient kingdom was no more.

All history shows, in harsh, unsparing figures,
Gigantic marks of Change. Imperial power,
Illustrious dignity, the might of arms,
And empire's wide dominion — all of greatness
Lost in the centuries, and all of glory
Dim in their shadows. Pause and look behind,
Down the long vistas of historic years,
What grand examples do they show of change!
Egypt, Phœnician Carthage, Macedon,
And greatest of the antique nations, Rome —
Where now are these? Stupendous forms appear,

Enthroned and crowned with empire's majesty,
Vast, shadowy phantoms of the ancient time
When each, in sceptred might, Colossus-like,
O'erstrode, gigantic, their subjected lands;
While weirdly gleams the flash of spectral light
From graves of empire. Hollow voices cry,
"We were the great of Earth in our great day;
But Time and Change have swept our power away!"

Where now the occult science Egypt's lore
Gave to the world when to her ancient sages
Came student youth, Phœnician, Hebrew, Greek,
To drink with eager thirst of wisdom's cup —
To catch, from lips of Isis' large-browed priests,
The seeds of thought-matured philosophy,
To plant and foster in barbarian lands
Until they ripened in enlightenment,
And civilization spread to all the world?
As drifting sand engulfs the palaces
That Egypt reared in her meridian day,
So sands of time engulf her history;
Arts, wisdom, science, lost amid the years,
With all the annals of her earliest life.

Where are the ships of Carthage, that of yore
Sailed out with merchandise, or armed for war —
Adventurous beaks that traversed every sea:
Along the coasts where Grecian Jason sailed
To fruitful Colchis for the Golden Fleece;
Beyond the pillars built by Hercules
When he went out to capture Geryon's herds;

Or to those famous "Islands of the West,"
The far Atlantis of the Ocean Kings?—
Where are they now? They sail the seas no more.
Over the city of the Tyrian Queen
The Roman drove his plowshare, and its tracks
Sowed deep with salt, to show his bitter hate.
Carthage destroyed, rebuilded and destroyed,
Exists no more; a barren waste of hills,
Where now archæologists dig in her ruins,
Searching for buried relics of her past,
Is all remains of her magnificence.

Where is the empire that the bounds of earth
Confined in narrow limits of its map,
Too small a kingdom for th' ambitious one
Who wept for worlds to conquer? Change on change
Hath swept his land, and Macedon is now
A province of the Turk; and the old tale,
How crouched the East beneath the victor foot
Of him who, in the Libyan desert, claimed
Descent from Ammon, seems a fairy myth,
The romance of an Eastern story-teller
When the tired caravan at mid-day halts,
And weary camels stretch along the sands
While their swart-visaged masters sit them down
To smoke their perfumed pipes, and hear a tale
Of wondrous marvel, such as Scherezade
Told to her Sultan in th' Arabian Nights.

Where are Rome's armies? In the olden time
The trampling of her legions shook the lands

From Tigris to the Thames. An iron war
Poured from her city of the palaced hills —
Where Janus' temple stood with open doors —
As from Vesuvius or Etna poured
Hot lava streams of fire. Her eagles flew
O'er mountains, rivers, deserts, stormy seas,
Stretching her empire round the trembling world;
Subduing Britons in far distant isles;
Crushing the Afric on his sandy desert;
And driving all the North's barbarians
To seek asylum on their mountain-tops.
In the rich East, Rome gathered dearest spoils —
Spoils to despoil the spoiler: Asia's wealth
And Egypt's pomp relaxed the arm of War,
And lost the victors in the siren charms
Of Luxury and Sloth. While thus effete,
On their soft dalliance came the locust swarms
Of wild barbarians, Tartar, Scyth, and Hun,
Who trampled down Rome's glory and her power.
Now Roman war affrights the world no more;
The Roman soldier and his victor sword
Symbols of the antique: they live in bronze
To ornament these days; their lesson hid
Beneath the glory of dead Cæsar's name.

X

Progress

Deft hands of Change, the little and the vast,
Are shaping progress; and each age, elate,
Prides itself on its higher, broader state,
And all things new and better than the past;
Sees, in the present time, the proud forecast
Of fortunes that, upon its progress, wait
To make its era more supremely great,
And win the world more happiness at last.
The darlings of this progress — who can fill
The list ?— Inventions, skill, philosophy,
Wealth, culture, various fashions good and ill,
Have each their claim of high ascendency;
While the vain world, though oft neglectful still
Of largest aims, grows wiser day by day.

As in the past, the nations of to-day
Are plastic to disturbing touch of Change
That whirls upon them with resistless acts,
Or shapes their destinies with slower care.
Often Change comes in petty, trifling things
Which we deride, or in the garb of fashions
At which we laugh, but while we laugh, assume;
Sometimes its progress hides in mysteries,
Intricate problems that we cannot solve;
Or the strong march of circumstances sets
Broad marks upon the people and the land,
Shaping opinion by the might of facts

And breaking barriers which the centuries
Have labored long to make impregnable.

The rustic dwellers of an inland vale,
Wondering, behold a busy, noisy band
Invade their quiet fields. Across the stream,
Along the valley, through the hills, toil these;
Bridging, embanking, cutting, tunneling,
And laying down, in straight or curving track,
Their double lines of steel. The trespassed vale
Sleeps quietly no more. The reaper turns
To see a clashing train go swiftly by;
The children run in terror to their homes,
Or, with pale faces, peep from cottage doors;
Cattle affrighted gallop o'er the fields;
And dogs bark loudly. From the neighboring hills
The mocking voice of Echo sends again
Her murmur of the din. Swift to those hills
The monster speeds; scared Echo's voice is mute;
And all the tumult dies. But time goes on,
And railway trains grow into common things,
While populous towns spring up along their line.

The youthful reaper who in wonder turned
To see a thing of noise and smoke and strength
And crashing wheels disturb his quiet day,
Resumed his work again; but marveled much,
As often on his mind the thought would push:
The world hath stranger things perchance than this,
Beyond these fields;— until, at length resolved,
He leaves his scythe in less adventurous hands,

And goes to seek his fortunes "down the line;"—
His fortune, work; of which in time are born
Knowledge and skill; these he brings back with him;
And in those fields, where once he swung a scythe,
Builds hugely up a gaping furnace-stack,
And harvests iron as of old the grain.

So progress makes marked changes in the land,
And in its people. In the Past they lived
In full content to cultivate the fields
On which, like native growth of shrub, or tree,
Or slothful cattle, fortune cast their lives —
Content to obey the laws their fathers held;
To question nothing in the plan of things
They had not wit nor wish to understand.
But changeful Progress, jostling men together,
Provokes a multitude of teeming thoughts;
All things are questioned; and the old-time law,
Under the pressure of opinion, bends;
'Tis propped perhaps, or some new form contrived
To suit the fashion of the changing times;
Or, if too long neglected, breaks downright,
And greater change is built upon its wreck.

Awakened thought disturbs the minds of men,
And will not let them rest. What one man thinks
Hath not, in him alone, disturbing power
To move mankind; but his thought's progeny
May stir the world in countries most remote;
For, while he speaks, his thought is cast abroad
As flies a feathered seed that chance may set

In fertile soil, and kindly sun and rain
Nurture to fruitfulness; the harvest often
Beyond proportion to the slender planting:
No seed so sure to grow as a new thought.
Public opinion is the thought matured
In many minds, the harvest of the seed —
A harvest often overwhelming law
Founded on old belief and precedent,
As a mud dike goes down before the storm
And wash of waves. The progress of the world
Is by enlightenment of the general mind,
That marks advance with corresponding change
In the political and social state
Of every people who receive its help.

As knowledge, science, art, pour larger light
On man's intelligence, it is as if
He put a window in a dark, old tower
Where dusky shadows long have had their homes,
And where hath lurked the legendary ghost
With bats, and owls, and creatures of the night.
Now, from his ancient perch, the spectre flits
To find a place of gloom; the light of day
Dissolving its thin shape in mockery:
This poor, light-haunted ghost is a fit type
Of ignorance; for, in the kindling beams
The new day sheds on yesterday's dull gloom,
Old superstitions, born of ignorance
And crafty frauds that would enslave the world,
Long reared in darkness, are lit up by truth,
And their grotesque proportions so displayed

That laughter drives away the things long feared,
As a grown child laughs off a bugaboo.

Could we anticipate the coming years,
Outstrip gray Time in his untiring flight
Through centuries, so looking forward, read
The pages of an unmade history,
What startling changes might such reading show!
What strange development of trifles now,
Cast then enormous figures on the page
To mock our prophecies! How will the years
Roll over men? Will such progression make
Them wiser, happier? Will the heavy chains
Forged in the Past, drop, one by one, away
Till, free in soul and limb, our race shall stand
Beneath the stars, a little less than angels?
Or will the ancient bonds, a heritage
From all our ancestry, be heired along
Our line, and keep its last descendant
A bondman, though impatient of his bondage?
The nations of to-day, will they dissever
As the old peoples of the past have done,
And, gathered from their fragments, new states rise,
To grow and flourish? to decay and die?
What changes burden the immediate years,
Rounding events our lives assist to shape?
This is no age of prophecy; no sibyl
Now gives an answer to our questionings;
But in the ferment of this strenuous age
Who fails to see that large results are brewing?
That, in the menstruum of present movement,

Are greater transmutations being wrought
Than wildest dream of olden alchemist?

Will War be laid away on marble tomb
Like armored effigy of valiant knight,
And Peace, with olive wreath on saintly brow,
With sister, Justice, bearing equal scales,
Sit the fair judges of each questioned claim?
Have years subdued War's fierceness? sapped his strength?
Ah, no! This demon, mighty in the past,
Grows yet more lusty in these modern days;
Nor feels the wasting touch of Time's decay
On his strong limbs; but with a monarch's voice
Bids Science bring him newly-fashioned arms;
Knowledge equip his strength with each device
Her cunning can contrive; and all the toil
Of modern thought new-sharpen his old sword.
Breech-loading weapons, guns of calibre
Immense, steel battle-ships, impregnable,
Armed with a force beyond the thunder-bolt
The Greek imagined in the hand of Zeus,
The world's vast workshops filled with armorers
Forging with wondrous skill Cyclopic arms,
From furnace doors the molton steel outpouring,
Ton after ton, in gaping cannon molds,—
Beholding Science toil, with blackened hands
And sooty brow, thus forging giant arms,
We may not dream War's fierce campaigns are over,
Or that sweet Peace can steal away his sword,
And teach the olden giant milder arts,

To train the vine, to till the fallow earth,
Or reap the rustling fields of yellow grain.

O Change, thou art the spirit of the three —
The fabled three who spin and cut life's threads!
And from thy distaff run so many lines
Of chanceful fortunes, weaving into webs
Of strange entanglement about our lives,
That, like a subtle, calculating Fate,
Thy restless hand entwineth thread with thread,
And fashioneth the fabric of the Future
From the unfinished patterns of the Past:
And human passions, hopes, and selfishness,
War, Peace, Prosperity, Want, Famine, Death,
Are figures woven in thy tapestry:
As the life-roll unfolds they flash before us,
Filling to-days and promising to-morrows,
As they have done in many yesterdays.

XI

Man

Angel or brute? What place in the great scheme
Of life and progress is assigned to man?
He vainly strives to grasp the wondrous plan,
But finds imagination's finest dream
Fail to reach up to it. His life would seem
Transferred by Change, since earth-life first began,
From form to form: through countless eons ran
Progressive types. Till man appeared no gleam
Of high intelligence illumed the Past;
So doth he reason; and, from this, assumes
In him the line completed; he the last;
Nor deems himself a form that Nature dooms
To pass from Earth as, in an earlier day,
Crude, uncouth, monstrous creatures passed away.

And man, himself, doth change in Nature's plan —
Man, theme of every song he vainly sings,
Nature's great egotist; for whom the world —
Ay, the wide universe!— was greatly built;
For whom the stars were set within the skies;
For whom the glad sun shines, the moon revolves,
The rainbow spans the clouds, the clouds are tinged
With rainbow tints; for whom the flowers bloom,
Summer with bounty smiles, and wholesome fruits
Grow ripe in Autumn days; for whom the tribes
Of lower life exist, his food, his slaves,
Or idle playthings of his idle hours,

Doomed, by his theories magnanimous,
To please himself, then yield existence up
Without a future, or another use;
For whom, through the immeasurable lapse of ages,
Matter was marvelously moved in space,
By slow degrees Earth's masonry upreared,
A palace builded for this haughty king,
In whose bright halls he struts and domineers
Through an allotted life so very short
That, in the process of the general movement,
It holds no measure with infinity —
How doth he change? Must he, perforce, believe
In a development from lower things —
From brutal tribes, he deems are far beneath
His kingly rank; and these perhaps derived
From earlier types of cruder animals,
Descending in a nice, organic scale,
By mystic laws through vegetation's forms,
To find gross parentage in the primitive rocks?
This origin hurts his pride, too greatly vain
Of his high powers and higher destiny—
Which fond desire hath largely pictured out
On the wide canvas of post-mortem life—
To listen to the claims of Mother-Earth,
Or to acknowledge kinship with the sod—
Too much incredulous of power and goodness
To think God's scheme is large enough to hold,
In the wide halls of its futurity,
Aught but his self-elected, fortunate race.
Yet all his science reads the Past in vain,
Or points along a path that leads him down,

Not up, in scale of things intelligent,
In every search to trace his ancestry:
Through the lake dwellers and the age of stone,
Rude cave-men dwelling, like the brutes, in dens,
Comrades of mammoth and rhinoceros,
Back to the days when the wild forest glades
Shook with the terror of gorilla shrieks—
When, monarch of the wild, the primitive man
Waged dreadful battle with enormous brutes,
Himself as brutal as his hunted quarry,
But king of brutes by right divine of valor;
Oft moved, perhaps, by strange and fitful dawning
Of an intelligence one day to crown
With kinglier glory his posterity.
Finding this genealogy, far-traced,
Dragging a loathsome track, through brutes, to earth,
Not winging back to kindred angels, man
Turns to re-search more carefully the past,
To find the clue that leads him up, not down;
But all in vain: throughout the paths of earth
Are found life's foot-prints and their changing shapes,
Showing slow growth from crude, inferior being
Upward to man. From the first dawn of life,
Each in its wonderful diversity,
Mollusk, worm, insect, reptile, fish, bird, beast,
And all the myriad forms of vegetation,
Have joined one universal prophecy.

XII

Force

There is a fable of a god of old,
A Titan son of Earth in mythic day,
Who fashioned men most curiously of clay;
But they were lifeless; so the tale is told.
To give his creatures life, the Titan bold
Climbed up to Heaven—Minerva showed the way—
And stole, from chariot of the sun, a ray
Of fire, whose energy was manifold,
To fill his men of clay with godlike force:
A double gift was in the heavenly fire,
To move dull clay, to give it consciousness:
Earthly the men, but from celestial source
The power of mind to make their thoughts aspire,
And all the might that human acts express.

The chemist tests a fragment of the earth,
Counting the elements therein contained.
If we may do the like with all the world,
Making analysis of Nature's mass,
We find three elements compose the whole—
Consciousness, matter, and a moving force.
Matter unmoved by force had been but death;
For life means more than one commanding touch—
Than merely a creation: one quick change
From nothingness to being would have thrilled
Infinity; and, after that, a sleep.

The Power that made creation would have shown
A barren exercise of useless Will,
Filling infinity with stagnant death.
No! to all things create, an attribute
Of Primal Power was given: force, like a storm,
Came down upon the new-born atomies,
And drove them madly on. No lifeless sleep
Was the great purpose of Creative Thought
In the conception of far-reaching matter.
We cannot read the purpose of creation,
But know so much: whatever be the end,—
If end there be — it will be wrought through changes
That work so busily about us now,
Molding Earth's substance as a potter molds,
And spins to shape, a lump of plastic clay.

Matter and force!—how mightily they move,
And in what puzzling ways of intricacy,
Driving on blazing paths enormous suns,
Sending quick telegrams through nerves of life,
Painting with brilliant hues a butterfly,
Writing a history on the rind of earth!—
Matter and force! still the great acts go on:
Around us the phenomena of Change
Present continuous action, mingling whirl
Of many wheels that make confusing hum;
Yet all subserve one purpose and one will,
While, through their clatter, Time his pendulum
swings,
Telling that Nature moveth ever on
With certainty. What is the purposed aim

Thus meant by Change? Why this machinery
Whose ceaseless movement rattles in our ears?
What does it mean? — weird riddles of the Sphinx
That broods upon the world's deep mysteries.
And hereupon more puzzling riddles hang:
The third great element in Nature's plan,
A consciousness that gathers to itself
Matter and force to shape them into thought,
Is, with both force and matter, closely mixed
In its own being. Wherefore are we here?
What is the purpose of the life of man?
Is it to eat and drink and fill each sense
To full satiety with animal joys?
Is it to sleep a lazy lifetime out
As one would doze away a dreary stage?
If such the purpose, the machine is built
Too finely for its use. Beneath the whole,
Matter and force and vital consciousness,
The mystery lies, obscurely hidden from us
In the dim fog of our dull faculties
That cannot see beyond their own gray haze
The clear, bright beauty of the Master-Thought,
The simple purpose of the numberless wheels
Of this bewildering Change. Perhaps in vain
We weary brain and heart to learn the thing
Too broad for our conception. In our school
We sit as yet upon the lower seats,
And study rudiments; the time may come
We shall sit higher. In the forms of Change,
And Nature's processes, is written wisdom:
May not our mission be to study Change?

From tangled intricacy evolve its laws?
The mind's broad powers point to such design,
A nobler use than feeding passion's fever,
Gorging brute sense, the lethargy of slumber,
Or dragging thought on tramways through our lives.
If 'tis too much to hope to know the whole,
Then we may learn a little; lift ourselves
Toward the light whose glimmering intimates
A wise intent hath drawn the myriad lines
Of puzzling maze, to us a labyrinth
Without an Ariadne's thread to guide.
Matter and mind, in their dependency
And close relation, make a serious problem
Whose study, though it yield us no solution,
May slowly bring us intellectual growth,
And ripen mental strength as, step by step,
We rise to level of each higher thought
That brings us nearer to the wondrous plan,
Now far beyond the present reach of mind,
The other end of life's entangled skein.
Meanwhile we must content us to go on
Still in the rudiments, and leave the end
In the safe hand of an unfailing Wisdom
That fashioned matter, lent it living force,
And placed man's consciousness amid its whirl.

Force into matter — the result is Change :
Action that sends far-traveling sun-rays forth;
That molds the things of Earth; that governs men,
Their races, nations; that disturbs the seas;
That through all nature builds the countless germs,
Developing a universal life.

Force into consciousness — there still is Change:
The human mind is not a steadfast thing;
If immaterial its substance be,
It hath so much analogy with Earth
To feel the active tyranny of Force,
And dance with atoms in their frenzied whirl.

XIII

Identity

Identity? Nay, is it not a dream,
  This oft-recurring fancy of my brain,
  That in the whirl of life I may remain
O'er fate and fortune happily supreme,
While Change transforms all else? How false to deem
  That I, alone, am stable! And how vain
  To think, amid life's hurry, joy and pain,
To stay the rush of Time's impetuous stream!
  A little child laughs gaily as he sails
On boyhood's sea, his life a merry play;
  Strong manhood thrills while passion's stormy gales
Blow round him, life a stern reality;
  While lingering Age recalls his earlier days —
  Can one identity run through the maze?

  I dare not hug the thought that I, myself,
Am constant to myself; for yesterday
The sunshine and the lovely bloom of flowers,
By some sweet mystery, seemed parts of me;
But while to-day the same bright sunshine glows,
And loveliest flowers, of dainty tint and shape,
Put forth their bloom and perfume round my way,
Their beauty is a cruel mockery,
Like tempting grapes to hunger-wasted lips
Of tortured Tantalus. Are happiness
And misery the same? Alas, in me
The change! There was a gay and radiant time
When bright Romance hung garlands on each chance
Of smiling fortune; and a dismal time

When mocking demons plucked away each charm
That sweetens life; the great world desolate
And dreary; beauty, the unworthy tints
Painted on shameless cheeks to hide decay —
A time of buoyancy — a time of gloom —
Time of credulity and time of doubt.
It is within my bosom and my brain,
Not in the outward world of facts and forms,
These changes have been wrought; they came to me
By sympathetic ties of Mother-Earth;
By oft experience of matter's change;
In joy's gay laugh; in disappointment's tears.
Through all the action of this busy scene
Phase follows phase as spokes flash round a wheel:
So closely crowd conditions on the mind
That momentary beings pass away,
Leaving faint impress on the heedless brain,
And new ones dawn, which in their turn give place
To others, thronging there, to flash and die,
Dividing life in parts so numberless
We cannot stay to mark or measure them.
Great epochs, crowning changes, come to all,
Broad tide-marks, where the swelling flood of fortune
Floats our life-ship upon a glorious sea,
Or in its ebb, upon some dreary shore,
Wrecks and destroys hope's richest-freighted voyage—
Eras on which Remembrance loves to dwell;
Or pale-faced Misery in sorrow broods.
These are apart, perhaps with years between,
While woven round in many-colored web,
The various fabrics of the lives of men,
In diverse patterns curiously are wrought.

XIV

The Blind Goddess

"I am too happy!" the rich Lydian cries,
And throws his costliest ring in the deep sea;
Then homeward sails to feast and revelry.
To the stern Fates he makes his sacrifice;
Believes his jeweled ring their favor buys.
When now the king is dining happily
They serve a fish of wondrous rarity,
That morning caught, a huge and luscious prize —
What doth the carver give the startled king?
The sea returns the monarch's precious ring!
Pales the king's face. "Alas! alas!" he cries,
"The cruel Fates my costly gift despise!
Look down, Apollo, from our Lydian skies,
And quench the hate in the fell sisters' eyes!"

I must not trust the pleasant promises
Of smiling Fortune; nor forget, the fillet
That binds her eyes may hide her mischievous guiles;
Nor grow enamored of her sunny looks
And dangerous charms until they drive away
Prudence, protecting fears, and recollection
Of all the lessons of her frail caprice.
I may not rest in safe tranquillity,
Though custom tell me that to-morrow's dawn
Will be as fair, its summer blossoms open
As sweetly, as to-day's. If charmed and drugged
By poppy-perfumes of my happiness,
I dream of bright to-morrows; weep, perhaps,

O'er woes that touch my neighbors — tears soon
dried
In my own pleasant sunshine — nor believe
Calamity can come to cast its shadow
Upon my pleasant life; so perilous dreams
May be the prelude of sad opposites
And dread realities. How rude the shock
To see th' enchanted palace of my joys
Sail suddenly away! bare, dismal deserts
Mock my dismay! — to mark on friendly faces
The sympathetic limning of the grief
That tortures me! Philosophy, alas,
In thy cold schemes there is no sovereign cure
For broken hearts! Thy wholesome antidotes
Must be preparatory to our hurts,
And temper joy's wild flush with calming thoughts
Before calamity's black days appear!
As in romantic tale an errant knight
Puts on his strongest suit of proven mail
When he would venture in enchanted lands,
Or through the magic halls of some charmed castle
Where gorgeous beauty shines in golden splendor;
So we should buckle wisdom's safest harness
Securely on our bosoms when we go
To meet the fairest fortune, lest beneath
A Siren smile may lurk a Siren's guile —
Harness of wisdom on whose cold, steel rings
Misfortune's arrows may unhurtful fall,
And rough Adversity's malicious blows
Rattle in vain. When Fortune sweetly smiles
Let us remember what a sage of old

Declared: "No one may say, 'Happy am I,'
Until his life hath reached a happy end";
For lo! the demon, Change, uplifts his head,
And Crœsus is despoiled of countless wealth,
His haughty forehead leveled in the dust,
His crown exchanged for fetters of a slave.
Nay, man knows not his lines of destiny;
Draws not the figure of each act of change:
Defeat or victory — a prize or shame —
Master or fugitive — a throne or chains —
As Fortune turns her wheel! From greatest height
Is most disastrous fall; then happy he,
Perchance, who, little rising, little risks —
But so nobility of life were lost
With all the high ambitions of the soul:
Who greatly risks for good may laugh at Fate;
For, failing, still he wins despite of Fate.

XV

Life's Romance and Reality

Each of the Earth's great human brotherhood
  Who breathes to-day dear life's vitality
  Finds in his heart sweet Hope. Although he be
Of an uncultured mind and fortune rude,
Or scholar trained to mental aptitude,
  A savage in his wild barbarity,
  Or learnéd doctor of philosophy —
Each, in his thoughts, though in much-differing mood,
  Through all his wisdom, or his ignorance,
Feels there is hope in every mystery,
  A golden thread within the web of chance
In the unfolding of life's history.
  My fond desires have countless millions known;
  And millions yet to be will make my hopes their own.

A mother looks with wistful wondering
In her child's infant face, and while she soothes
His little murmuring, fondly speculates
On what the future hath in store for him:
In the soft beauty of his baby smile
Sees promise of a bright prosperity;
Kisses his chubby hands and dreams of fortunes,
Beyond the luck of all his ancestry,
Waiting her darling in the coming years.
So Eve, proud mother, glorious life imagined
For Cain, the first-born of the sons of men,
And first of murderers, as he lay, a cherub,

In smiling innocence in her fond arms;
And so the Hebrew mother of the traitor
Among the twelve dreamed that her son might win
The plaudits of the world. The morn of life!
What countless possibilities appear
Awaiting him whose little, untried feet
Press on life's threshold! Will he win, or fail,
Amid the changes of his swift career
From cradle to the grave? His infancy
Is passed in prattle, wonder, laughter, shouts,
A few half-smiling tears. The magical touch
Of Change soon brings to his bright, laughing eyes
A look of thought; his golden hair grows dark;
The dimples disappear from his round cheeks;
And his fond mother sees, with happy pride,
Her baby grown a tall and manly youth.
He feels the change with many a tingling thrill
Of quick emotion. In his bounding heart
A hundred sanguine hopes, with joyful cheer,
Shout happy fortunes. Life — that in childhood's eyes
Seemed a long stretch of unknown galleries
Dim in the distance — by enchantment now,
And sudden birth of potent intuitions
Responsive to his own awakenings,
Catches bright lustre from his glowing thoughts,
And shines illumined, like a summer dawn,
With rosy light; soon casts each veiling shadow
Of morning twilight, and arrays fair shapes
In all the gay enticements of delight.

As if the signal-bell had loudly rung
In life's great theatre, the curtain lifts,
And shows a marvelous scene, as beautiful
As new; on which not only his glad eyes
May gaze, but his elastic footsteps tread.
Enraptured doth he pass the golden gate
Of the charmed garden of the Hesperides—
Enchanted by twin spells of youth and hope.
The golden fruit hangs yellow o'er his head;
The dragon sleeps; he laughs to see the prize
Within his reach and bending to his hand.
Yet, ere he plucks, fair Pleasure smiling comes,
And beckons him to join her laughing train,
And revel with her and her rosy Hours.
Then buoyant youth, in his glad heart, exults;
The merry dance, the jovial crew allure;
Life's prizes are forgotten in that hour
Of sweet enchantment and beguiling joys.
Trampling beneath his hasty, careless steps
The fragrant roses, he would catch each joy
That laughing flies, while laughing he pursues;
Turns to each fairy shape that gaily flits
On Summer wing like bright-hued butterfly;
Sleeps amid flowers, to wake and laugh again,
And drink, to full satiety, delight.
But the gay laugh at length forsakes his lips;
The garden blossoms fall from withered boughs;
The golden fruit, that dazzled once his eyes,
Unplucked, neglected, rots upon the ground;
Pleasure departs with all her noisy train,
A cynic sneer upon each back-turned face;

And sweets grow sour; the dragon from his sleep
Awakes; and Danger threatens in the paths
Where Pleasure danced with sweet, seducing wiles.
Maturity now gathers up his powers
To fight the dragon, though the guarded prize
Be lost; and if he win, or if he fail,
The golden opportunity, once his,
Returns no more. He deems youth's darling hopes
The vain illusions of green ignorance;
Pleasure's bright joys, the tinsel of a show;
The garden flowers, rank weeds without a use;
Beauty too often falsehood's painted mask.
Strong in himself, he sets his brain and limb
To win his way, and if to victory,
It is by help of the fair hand of Fortune,
Or by his own strong heart. The will to dare
Is a charmed talisman to win success:
The world gives place to him who dares to take it,
Denying name and trust of leadership
To careful prudence, or slow steps of wisdom,
To cast them down before the resolute foot
That leaps unshrinking to the front of perils.
The while his star of fortune brightly burns,
His course is ever onward. He achieves
Perhaps beyond the visions of his youth:
What then had seemed above even daring's reach
Is now within his grasp; — but while he boasts
Of robust strength, feels Time's so heavy hand
On his strong limbs, and failing muscles shrink —
On his wise brain, and memory vainly seeks
To hold the thought in which his thought was strong.

While yet he strives to renovate his strength,
Hears his grandchildren prattling of his age;
Strokes his gray beard, and tells the youngsters tales
Of what their grandsire did; sleeps in his chair
In dozing dullness while quick-footed hours
Run past him; wakes to prattle like a child
With little, merry laughers 'round his knee;
But sleeps at length more soundly, and is laid,
With funeral honors in a grave-yard bed,
Or marble tomb; on which, perhaps, is set
A monument, whose cold, deep-chiseled words
Record his name and age, or haply make
A line or two of title, place or rank,
On which his children gaze complacently;
Or scrap of verse, which soon becomes antique,
And makes the curious reader smile the while
He muses on this record of a life.

XVI

The Psyche's Intuitions

"It is a god!" the Egyptian artist cried.
"It thinks! How dared I, poor earth-creature, cut
The stone that holds a god! Back to my hut,
And from the mighty one, with trembling hide —
How wonderful, my chisel deified,
With clumsy art, the power and grandeur shut
Within the rock! — My rude hand wrought it not:
No art of mine could thus my chisel guide.
What is its thought? I know not. Who can tell?
Too wise for me the purposes that dwell
In that stone face. Perhaps those lips, now still,
May one day speak; that brow, for good or ill,
Unfold the wondrous mystery divine
That mocks me now from every graven line."

In the capricious bosoms of mankind
Religion hath as often varying form
As mind's diversity: calm, vehement,
Austere, or cheerful, full of gentleness,
Or harsh with rigor of compelling fires,
Filling glad hearts with joyful promises,
Or mortifying life with pains and cares.
It howls and whirls in frenzy with the dervish;
Fasts with the lonely hermit of a cave;
Falls into prayer with Moslem when the call
Of blind muezzin sounds from minaret;
Builds the great dome of holy Peter's church;
Or travels, footsore, to some sacred shrine,

With a devoted band of pious pilgrims;
With Epicurus laughs; with Cato frowns;
Or with Diogenes finds happiness
When the blest sunlight shines upon his tub;—
Yet, under many forms, one principle
Maintains, the common mover of men's hearts:
A keen perception of th' unresting force
That drives its chariot wheels around the Earth,
And flashes change from every star of heaven,
Combined with consciousness of impotence
To stay one atom or delay one change,
Compels the worshiper, on bended knees
To lift his prayers to some symbolic god,
Or bow his soul before the mastery
Of an omniscient and eternal Power.—
The creature calleth to divinity.

The savage lifts to his bright sun-god's face
Worshiping hands; adores the silver moon;
Hears a god's voice in the deep tones of thunder;
Beholds his anger flash from night's deep gloom
In crooked, dazzling lines of blinding flame:
He worships an ideal of light and might
Enthroned mysteriously above the skies.
But when, instructed by conceptive thought,
Or prompted by imaginative dreams,
He fancies likeness to his intellect
In powers that change material shapes of earth,
Then powers of intellect become his gods
Garbed in the forms of man, or manlike beast.
Thus the old Greek, with ardent, artist mind,

Set on Olympian heights the thunderer, Zeus,
And heavenly court of his Saturnian kindred.
In Egypt broader thought built larger gods,
Symbols of force and of prolific Earth,
The great high-priests of a yet higher One,
But dressed in attributes of earthly life.
Mind was the moving power behind them all,
Compelling worship; man prostrated him
To forms of marble, bronze, or painted wood,
Because his mind adored ideal mind,
And here its symbol, though the worshiper
Oft, in fond ecstacy of fervent zeal,
Looked not, perchance, beyond the symbolism.

The larger culture of Egyptian priests
Decayed with age; Osiris, Isis fell,
And smaller gods were set upon their thrones.
O'er classic Greece and Latin Rome swept hordes
Of fierce barbarians from th' uncultured North,
Trampling soft luxury's minions underfoot,
Upsetting empire, crushing old-time rule,
O'erturning statues of divinities
And sacred altars on whose carven shapes
The Greek had lavished all his matchless art.
The sire of Saxons, large-limbed, flaxen-haired,
Dashed with his ponderous axe the front of Jove;
Clutched with fierce hands the radiant, golden zone
Of Venus; robbed god Mercury of his wand;
And laughed disdainful of such ones set up
In pomp of temples for a slavish worship.
In the religion of the servile South
The Northman sowed the seeds of bolder thought,

Conception of a better heritage
Beside, and not beneath, divinity.
Not abject adoration, but a claim
In right of manhood marked his nobler worship.

Meantime was born a large philosophy;
Out of a people's lowest rank was given
The pure example of a blameless life;
And lowly, from the midst of artisans
And simple fishermen, came forth a voice
That taught, the purpose of life's scheme is love —
A love that gathers to one Father-heart
His children, where the outcast, wretched leper
Hath equal place beside the sceptred king.
Too broad a theme! the narrow-thoughted ages
Caught but a glimmer of the kindly light
Thus offered them; and though the Pantheon
Was emptied of its olden deities,
Their counterparts were set in each high niche:
A Mary on the pedestal of Juno,
And row of sad-faced saints upon the blocks
Where once were poised the hero gods of Rome.
Still over all swept Time, th' iconoclast,
And many saints were hurled from sacred place
To mingle fragments with the broken gods
Of dead mythologies; and the sweet light
Of love was shadowed in the human heart
By superstition, ignorance, lust of power,
And a vain-glorious zeal of proselytism.
Flashing and flickering in the stormy breath
Of passions — as a blown torch flares about

In windy gusts, sometimes almost put out,
And the next moment flinging forth bright flames—
This theme of love, all-love, ill-comprehended,
Prompted the dogmas of conflicting creeds,
Divided churches; lit the cruel fires
That burned the martyrs; sent brave exiles forth
To plant their faith in lands beyond the sea.

So hath Religion, like fantastic masker,
Appeared in many shapes and various dress;
But yet, within, a moving instinct, held
Unchangeable its grasp of worshiping hearts;
And we, to-day, feel the submissive awe,
That bowed our ancestors to wooden blocks,
Bending us down, each to his chosen ideal.

XVII

Psyche's Search

The sun was rising o'er the desert's rim,
A globe of fire, when a lone Arab cried,
Low kneeling by his dying camel's side:
"Help me! O help me, gods! Misfortune grim
Hath overwhelmed me, spirit, heart and limb!
What god can find me in this desert wide?"
"Cry not to gods until thou first hast tried
To help thyself!" a genie called to him,
As o'er the desert waste on mighty wing
He flew. "Seek thou thy gods, nor feebly stay
Their coming! Straight to the northward must thou fare
Unto a well; thou hast the strength will bring
Thee safely through, though weary be the way;
There is thy god: go thou and seek him there!"

As Science is released from brutal grasp
Of Superstition, in her gratitude
She fills the world with cheerful promises
And ready help; elucidating puzzles
That long have vexed bewildered intellect;
Gathers and classifies determined facts;
Reads many laws ordained to rule and move
The primal atoms that creation gave;
Clearing the way for broader reach of thought,
That men may look above with grander zeal
Than object-worship shining in their eyes.
While building the high throne of deity

Grander and brighter than blind adoration
Hath skill to do, she whispers to the souls
Of worshipers suggestions from the thought
That all the showings of nice powers of sense,
All that wise thinkings yet have raveled out
From the confusing maze of intricacy,
Are little parts of a well-ordered whole,
The simpler figures of an infinite scheme
Where relative conditions are the words
God speaks to man by Nature's myriad tongues.
Thus placed, a scholar in the school of life,
He needs no more such symbols, as of old,
To give his mind communion with his God:
Nature gives larger symbols, in its facts,
Than grandest imagery of the ideal —
A positive showing of the Infinite Will —
Letters engraven broadly on the world,
Telling of power, beneficence, and love.

Science is knowledge classified, a step
From Nature's manifestations to their laws,
A reading of the lessons set for man
In his first primer-book, the outspread world,
Showing how near at hand, and out beyond,
A supreme Wisdom reigneth. As a scheme
Of nice adjustment and well-balanced force —
Conception of a unity of thought
And steadfast purpose in each busy movement,
A wise contrivance in life's noisiest whirl —
Glimmers in faint reflection on his mind,
It kindles there ambition's daring fires

And grand suggestions that reach broadly out
From atoms, movement, laws, to their First Cause:
That which can comprehend must be of kind
With that which hath contrived — the thought is clear —
So man, perceiving Nature may be traced
Through little spaces by his patient thought,
Feels his relation to his God more near;
While the religious instincts of his soul
Prompt him to follow knowledge in the paths
Where Science leads to Nature's altar, Truth.
Religion, Science — why oppose the words?
One is the impulse to reach up, beyond
Earth's accidents, to Heaven's serenity;
The other shows the way. Another way
Faith, with her heavenward eyes, may point to us:
Each seeks the way to satisfy the soul.

The sainted zealot kneeling at the shrine,
Or prostrate cast beneath the crucifix,
Cries, in an ecstacy of fervent zeal:
"Salva, O Jesu, me miserrimum!"
An earnest preacher, warm in his belief,
Propounds to rapt disciples holy creed;
Franklin, with kite-string and a Leyden jar,
His forehead bared to angry elements,
Questions the flashing messengers of God;
Or Young — not he who wrote his sad "Night Thoughts,"
But the learned doctor of philosophy —
Follows the waves of light through devious maze

Up to the Source that planned their wondrous ways.
Which of these worshipers, thus lifting hands
Toward his throne, and to his light of truth,
Pays largest homage unto Deity?
Lays on his altar most acceptable gifts?
Which best fulfils the purpose of his being?
Follows most surely the instinctive guide
Set, like a compass, in the soul of man?
Which comes the nearest to the Heart of Love
Whose great pulsations fill the universe?
How dare we judge or draw dividing line?
The impulse, the adoring heart, the same;
In all the same up-reaching toward God!

While thus religion, an eternal law,
Impels mankind as matter is propelled
By gravitation, or as atoms move
Subject to laws of their affinities,
Around this native and unchanging force
We group our symbols in the fond belief
That thus we picture the great gates of Truth,
And that our thoughts are its mysterious light
Filtered through Nature into souls of men.

"Life is no little thing! O tell me not
Man is a worm conceived of crumbling dust,
And fragile as its atoms! Lo, I breathe!
And the sweet breath that fills my rising breast
Sends joy, with life, through every quickening pulse;
Bright fancies crowd in my conceptive brain,
And fashion thoughts that rise on heaven-born wings

So far above the narrow walls that hold
This organism of dust that I forget
My habitation is a group of cells,
A walking figure, an automaton
Wound up to run, perhaps, for four-score years;
While in my heart beat such ecstatic throbs
Of sympathy with grand ideals that life
Is lifted to their levels. Not a worm!
The thing of dust compounded, and no more,
Can never rise above its native dust
Save as the moth may flap its shining wings:
But I have higher wisdom than the laws
Of dust could give; and Nature whispers me,
This human wisdom is the bright crown-jewel
Of an immortal kingdom, to whose halls
This shape of earth is but the narrow portal."
So speaks proud Health. Come to his darkened room,
And hear the invalid on his bed of pain:
"O weary Hours, how slow! — how slow you move!
Your feet were quick to dance in days of health,
But now you linger as enamored of Pain;
You scarce would stop to toy with bright-eyed Pleasure;
Now will you stay to dally with Disease?
What an unworthy thing is weary life!
How poor a creature, man! Imprisoned thus,
A wretched victim in a torture-chamber,
I feel the cruel rack of pitiless pain
Distress each nerve and fibre of my body,
More sensitive to anguish than in health

They ever thrilled to the delights of pleasure.
Ah! once I deemed my soul was set above
The organism of life in such high place,
Its calm serenity might be unmoved
Although Disease, with cruel vulture-beak,
Should make each delicate nerve a shrinking prey.
Alas, serenity deserts me now;
And many fears and doubts, that long ago
Were laid to rest by wise philosophy,
Come darkly back, their wide-distended shapes
Casting disturbing shadows on my couch!
Fancy, that, in my days of better health,
Built up enchanted palaces of hope,
Now pictures sombre halls of darkening gloom,
Or frights me with the grave's deep, narrow walls!"
So groans the sick man on his weary bed
Till wilder phantoms come to chase away
Each reasonable thought, surrounding him
With all the weird, fantastic crew of shapes
Hot fever brings in her attendant train,
Frightful and motley in confusion mixed,
A dance of demons, clown, and harlequin.

XVIII

Psyche Looks Beyond

Is it a pleasant land to which at last
  We go when this Earth-pilgrimage is o'er,
  A fairer country on that other shore
Where all our future fortunes shall be cast?
So will I trust — so hold reliance fast:
  Death is but change, and we need fear no more
  The unknown world beyond its fatal door;
For Love and Reason say, that threshold passed,
"Progressive life will bless humanity:
If not the wondrous city, we are told
Hath shining streets adorned and paved with gold,
  Yet a bright land, where loving friends will be;
  And where our souls may grow more clear to see
The beautiful in God's high ministry."

The strife is over; multitudinous phases
Of life concluded; silent lies in death
The casket of a soul. No power remains
To stir again the nicely fashioned nerves,
Flashing intelligence to intellect,
Or sending forth the ready mind's commands.
The mechanism of muscle, frame of bone,
Sinews, cells, tissues, brain, veins, arteries,
Are perfect; but that subtle potency,
The soul, hath fled the pulseless shape of clay.
Relieved of tenancy, the empty house —
Its walls of flesh no longer held upright
By mystic agency of vital fires —

Returns again to kindred clay of earth,
Resolving into primal elements,
A pile of dust that Nature's artist hand
May touch anew, and model into forms
Of nice organic structure, which a breath
May thrill, life animate, and mind control,
Again to die, to be by death renewed.

But whither goes the death-enfranchised soul?
None may disclose the secret of its flight,
Hidden behind tear-sprinkled, awful gates
Made dread by doubts and fears. Why would we know
Our future dwelling and our future lot?
Why seek to draw aside the veil that hides
The change from life to death? — an idle wish,
Whose gratifying might belittle life,
Often most poor in its most fortunate light;
But, ah, how shrunken might it seem to us
In the effulgence of the clearer future!

Death, thy funereal curtain, hung between
Man and his future, hides with sable folds
A multitude of scenes! The unseen world,
As Faith or Hope or legends picture it,
Is set beyond the last momentous change
This failing organism of life can feel.
How many dreams of strained conceptive fancy,
Visions evoked from fevered brain of zeal,
Are placed beyond the threshold of this life!
Thrilled by an inspiration, Fervor paints,
With daring hand, the glorious halls of Heaven

And the new life, from death reanimate,
After the promptings of a fond desire,
Fancy's bright tints, or ecstasy's delirium;
And thinks the picture by a hand divine.

The din of arms rang through the ancient North;
And blue-eyed Norsemen cased gigantic limbs
In panoply of war. Their war-god, Odin,
Breathed on the blast mysterious messages
That stirred the hearts of warriors. From his brow
The fierce berserker swept his uncombed hair,
That hung its tangled, tawny masses down
His brawny shoulders and half-naked breast,
And lifted upward eyes that gleamed in light
Of frenzied zeal. He saw above him shine
Walhalla's halls, where, chanting battle-songs,
Were met the heroes of his ancestry,
Tall chiefs whose swords had cut the shields of kings;
Upon the swan's-bath, with their dragon beaks,
Defied the Storm-king and his dash of waves.
Upon vast tables is a mighty feast
With marvelous boar's flesh and the crooked horns
Foaming with mead: in noisy revelry
Are mingled gods and heroes shouting "Skoal!"
The Northman's heaven of rough and boisterous feasting
Saved him from Niflheim, from the gloomy Hela,
From famine, misery, and dread abode
In the deep cave of thick and hungry fogs.
A savage creed, by cruel legends taught,
Filled his barbaric heart with stormy joys;

Drowned Pity's pleading voice in War's alarms;
Drove the berserker, like a demon, forth,
The frenzied zealot of the savage North,
Who wooed grim death — to him a lovely bride —
As on the spears he rushed, and shouting fell,
That from wide-gaping wounds, his ghost might spring
To high Walhalla, and of Odin claim
A feaster's bench in his great banquet-hall.

A change of scene.— The clash of noisy cymbals
And piercing notes of Moorish music rang
Wildly among the fig-tree groves beneath
The shining walls of some Judæan town.
A swarm of dusky Arabs fiercely swept
On their fleet steeds, a sudden locust-flight
That stopped to devastate, then on again
To conquests new. Beneath the holy crescent
To die was gain; for Allah's chosen prophet
Pointed to golden seats and sensual joys,
For true believers, in that blissful heaven
Holy Mohammed had proclaimed to men.
The glow of wild fanaticism shone
In each keen Arab face, his black eyes gleamed;
He waved his tall lance; urged with sinewy limbs
His foam-flecked steed; and rode as joyfully
To death as, marching through dry wastes of desert,
The thirsty camels come to some cool spring.
In his death hour he saw the graceful forms
Of lovely houris whose encircling arms
Raised him from earth; the ardent joys of sense,
Wine-cups that sparkled, love-enticing maidens,

Possessed his latest thoughts. The earth receded
From his dim sight as Allah's kingdom dawned
Upon him, and he hailed the joyful morn
Gladly as guest, invited to a feast,
Crossing the threshold, sees a well-spread board,
Bright lights, and all the pleasant garniture
Promising sense and appetite delight.

Inspired by faith, the Hindu cast himself
Before the car of Vishnu, his great god,
Preserver of the world and of the soul
That dares to meet him at the gate of death.
As the freed spirit left his mangled form
Visioned delights awaited in the sky:
Delightful groves, bright, crystal streams, and lakes
With pearl-embedded strands; o'er fragant waves
Floated sweet lotus blossoms; gay-winged birds
Sang songs of love, and flitted radiantly —
Such was the vision in his glazing eyes,
His dear reward for sacrifice of life.

The dying Christian turns his thoughts from earth,
And as, with ebbing pulse, his life goes out,
Looks to the home his Father and his God
Hath made for him when Death shall bid him come
To his inheritance, a mansion built
By Father-love for his eternal rest.
While chilly tremblings seize his mortal frame,
Celestial music fills his dying ears:
The songs of seraphs call him up from Earth;
And pure-eyed angels, on their snowy wings,
A shining host, convey his soul to Heaven.

XIX

Psyche's Inspirations

The low-browed savage bows to earth his head
  Before the rude-carved idol of his race,
  And of the frightful monster begs a place
In his immortal kingdom of the dead.
Of this same kingdom, often contemplated,
  The wisdom of the world hath sought to trace
  The bounds, and every doubt and fear efface;
Describe its glory — all earth-glories fled —
  Show the clear splendor of its heavenly day,
The joyousness of immortality.
Lo! here broad-visaged, wise Philosophy
  Meets the brute savage in death's narrow way;
And in like knowledge of that unknown land,
Learning and Ignorance go hand in hand.

A sceptic cries: "There is no more beyond
The present life, nothing to hope, to fear;
Death is an end of thinkings, pleasures, pains;
Who would ask more would be dissatisfied
At last with an eternity of life.
Why drag the thing beyond its natural length
With fanciful translation to the skies?
Would you, like Alexander, be a god,
Who fill too poorly the small place of man?
Have all the ages taught mankind in vain
By their examples multiplied beyond
Our computation, by analogies
Plainly expressed through eons of constant death —

While Science vainly seeks man's future life —
That posthumous existence is hope's folly?
Man's weak attempt to glorify himself? —
Poor child of vanity! — an idle fancy?"
Then brings he skillful arts of sophistry
To show that man is nothing, matter nothing,
Soul a vain fancy and incapable
Of any proof of its own entity,
All things sensations unreliable,
And man's environment th' unknowable.
Then soul is but a myth; and what is man?
Ephemeral compound of the elements;
A happy union of material laws;
A fungus springing from the clods of earth;
No higher birth; no greater destiny:
And his immortal hopes, his large desires,
His yearning after God's eternal light
Of truth — these, then, are vain delusions all.

But yet this accident — this happy chance —
Phantasm of sensitive nonentity —
Thing of a base, material ancestry —
Mere aggregate of atoms — dares to claim
Beyond the potency of concrete matter;
Sets up a court of inquiry and sends out,
To parent laws, an absolute subpœna;
Tests them with questions and nice measurement
Until it learns the limitation of that
Hath built its structure and environment;
Weighs law with law, and traces movement back
Beyond the active agency of laws;

Winning at last, the prize of toiling thought,
A faint conception of some lesser parts
Of the great scheme of matter, force and life,
Of which its parent laws are but blind servants.
Can a created thing so far surpass
Its limited creators, and enjoy
A reach beyond the makers of its life?
Whence can it have enlargement of their powers?
Can laws create a thing to question laws?
Out of a brazen jar a genie rise,
As in the fable of th' Arabian tale?
So strange a thought mocks our credulity,
Less easy of belief than Zeal's great schemes,
The bright, elaborate picturings of Faith,
The grandest altar-piece her hand hath wrought,
The warmest coloring by Fancy laid,
The richest imagery of impassioned thought.

Testing the convolutions of gray matter,
Science declares that thought is but a function
Of brain; yet fails to find the potent cause
Of cerebration. Brain is the machine
Through which the soul expresses every thought,
As, through his violin, the skilled musician
Pours forth a flood of perfect melody.
There is no music in the sounding wood,
No thought in convolutions of the brain,
Without the moving power, the master-spirit.
The brain may die, the violin be crushed,
But thought and melody will still survive.
The brain is no more primal cause of thought

Than muscle, strength: each is a means, not cause —
Gray matter of the brain! Alas, if man
Must be content to deem his bosom's lord
Function of brain alone, and not a spirit
Divine, though dwelling in a house of flesh!

The lily rises from the lap of Earth
To burst in golden sunshine swollen buds,
And blooming yield to her bright bridegroom, day,
In soft profusion her fair virgin beauty:—
Beauty of purity in her white blossom
And a perfection of the lines of shape
Are blended in the flower's loveliness.
Whence is the lily's beauty? The calm ox,
Cropping the young and tender blades of grass,
Lifts not his stupid head and great, slow eyes
To gaze enamored of the lovely bloom;
He nothing knows of beauty; thinks indeed
The sweet, short grasses are more admirable
Than all the bloom of lilies. Whence is this?
Here are the lines of grace, the exquisite bloom;
And here the nice machinery of the eye
To see perfection in the lovely flower;
Yet in the ox is no effect of beauty;
Nor hath he ever known an intimation
Of that most subtile of the brain's perceptions —
That wonderful and precious mystery —
That moves man's bosom, and excites his soul,
When he beholds the lily's loveliness.
The mystery of beauty is a light
That flashes on his soul at the appeal

Of nature's picturings, as if he caught
An inspiration of the master-thought
Of which all nature is the imagery.
A consciousness of purity and grace
Of perfect form may live within the bloom
Of the fair lily;— who may dare to tell
The limitation of the lovely flower,
Or arrogate to man alone the message
It whispers of divinest harmonies?—
But to the soul of man the lily speaks
A more important message, different thoughts
Of beauty than those dreams of bud and bloom
That fill the blossom's simpler consciousness.
Man's recognition is of higher thought
Than grace or shape: he sees the curtain rise
A little from the psychic mystery
Of his own being and its close relation
To largest wisdom and eternal purpose
In Nature's universal harmonies.
So from the humbler lily comes the thought
Which lifts his soul to mental arrogance,
That he can read the legend of the flower;
Can feel its subtile pulsing symphonies
Bearing swift messages between himself
And life's supreme, divine Intelligence.
How can he, then, account himself a cipher —
He and the flowers to live brief lives and perish —
For all his intuitions surely cry
That harmony, at least, must be immortal?
It were a desecration of himself,

At which his intellect would make its protest
In every exercise of conscious thought.

Away, vain doubts, that clashing creeds suggest!
And if I may not climb on Jacob's ladder,
Where every step is a disputed dogma,
Yet am I not content to sleep in dust
Forever, only a forgotten shape
Of Earth that chance hath built of restless atoms.
Here in close confines of small space and time,
Mocked by the bickering forms of constant change,
And haunted by grim doubts of the desire
That fills my bosom, lest it be a strain
Of siren melody, and not the voice
Of Truth; yet is this life the worthier, nobler,
That it must battle with vague mysteries,
And bravely win its crowning victories
By patient toil and wise intelligence.
Entangled in the labyrinth of Change,
While Time's quick tumult whirls and hurries on,
We yet may work life's problem so far out,
To recognize the movement everywhere,
Eternal progress through the universe,
The constant march of life-thrilled atomies,
Unnumbered forms endued with vital force
That drives them ever onward — on to death?
But death stays not the restless rush of life;
Death is but change of form while life survives —
Life! always life! When life casts off one dress,
It puts another on: the spirit of life
Is universal — is it not immortal?

No atom of the Earth is lost in death;
How can I then be lost? Are human souls
So valueless that Nature casts them out
From the vast kingdom of immortal things,
And falsifying all her promises,
Plunges them only into nothingness?
So we were less than all the world of matter,
The only food for death, while meaner things—
Things that have been subservient to our uses—
Go on immortal in unending progress.

XX

Psyche's Flight

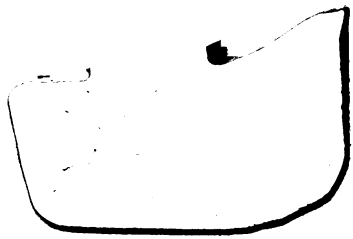
If, with Pythagoras, my mind would trace
How souls, through many bodies, have been fleeing,
So tracking life along the scale of being;
Or if I deem the progress of my race
Hath upward grown from beings low and base,
Still do I find the Psyche fret for freeing,
Although sublime, immortal life foreseeing;
Pining for freedom; seeking higher place.
Why should she flutter in a vain desire
To break her bars? Why foster so much pride?
Why scorch her fragile wings with passion's fire?
Why beg Philosophy her flight to guide?
A few quick-speeding years beneath the stars,
And Death will break her earthly prison-bars.

The careful study of progressive years
Builds science largely up from garnered facts;
But finds no way to bridge the yawning chasm
Stretching between two worlds which it would join.
Where Science fails Imagination flies
On airy wings above the dim abyss,
And summons spirits with a mystic call —
pirits, that Science, searching the vast, the small,
The high, the low, throughout her wide domains,
Had failed to reach with all her careful art —
These are not spirits of an unseen world,
But angel-dwellers in each human soul,
Guiding its highest, truest intuitions —

Spirits that build a rainbow bridge beyond
Where failing Science stands perplexed and dumb:
From thought to thought quick inspiration leaps,
Learning the wondrous truth that largest wisdom
Rests not on toil-built piers of masonry;
But, greatly daring, finds, in dizzy flights,
Its surest way and grandest, broadest range.
So, if we dare, we take the crown from Science,
And set it on the radiant, dazzling head
Of bold Imagination, in the hope
This tricksy spirit prove a faithful guide —
Imagination carefully directed
By intuitions of the human soul
May be a safer guide — if, as we trust,
Divinely sent from Heaven — than halting Science
That sees no path beyond the gates of Death.
What marvels of new change may come to us,
To all the world of atoms, when we leave
The old accustomed paths of life to venture,
Under new guidance, into unknown realms! —
New changes for the atom! — ever change!
For all the movement of unnumbered eons
Hath failed to fill the measure over-full;
And it may be that every change is progress
Of men, of atoms, of the universe;
While evolution, in its constant cycles,
Forces new truths from ancient mysteries.
The larger thought conceives a constant purpose
In Time's long march of countless centuries,
And, though it may not grasp the perfect plan,
Hath faith to take assurance that the grandeur

Of all the Past is no vain pageantry,
No masque of shadows meaningless, or false.
What last condition waits to crown the atom
Is past our knowledge; but so grand a march
Must be to some great end; nor can we think
Matter and force will ever separate;
But swing forever in unending cycles
Throughout the long eternity of time.
And man, sometime the master of the atom,
Hath comprehensive thought so far beyond
His little place of earthly circumstance
That every germ of truth he gathers here
Is full of promise, and unless it wither
Into a falsehood, breaking each relation
It bears to him and all, must still abide
With him, and grow to bloom and perfect fruitage
Beyond this ripple of the sea of Change
In clearer light and purer airs of Heaven.

Change is the movement of the Master's hand,
And constant purpose is divinely whispered
Beneath its touch: so are we ever drawn,
By what is best in us, to what is best
And wisest over all. If all too slow
We seem to come to good, the scheme extends
So far beyond our narrow symbol, Time,
That in eternity the fast and slow
Are merged and one; and Change at length may be
No longer cruel, but beneficent,
Making our journey through unending years
Full of delight and constant happiness.



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